

Greek tragedy in twentieth-century Italian literature: the poetic
translations of Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad

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Abstract

This thesis deals with poetic translations of Greek tragedy in twentieth-century Italian literature, aiming to intertwine the discourse on poetics with the practice of translation and, in particular, exploring specimens of translations from the Greek tragedies of two twentieth-century Italian authors: Camillo Sbarbaro (1888-1967) and Giovanna Bemporad (1923-2013).

Firstly, I locate Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations within the Italian cultural scene of their times and discuss the role of poet-translators within the wider debate on the reception of Greek tragedy. Secondly, I analyse Sbarbaro and Bemporad's translation methodologies. Thirdly, I trace the impact of translations on their poetic works, unveiling the profound influence of Greek tragedy on Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic discourse. Through textual and stylistic analysis, archival research and examination of their collected letters, my research shows the fundamental role of the translations of Greek tragedy in these authors' poetic trajectories.

While the thesis deals exclusively with Greek tragedy, I must note that the translations of Greek tragedies are but specific instances of the two poets' wider and systematic relationship with classical literature as a whole. In light of this, I consider the pedagogical commitment of these poets as being at the heart of their relationship with the Classics. Through an analysis of their experiences as teachers of Classics, which intensified

while they translated Greek tragedy, I uncover an aspect of their thought on the relationship between the Classics and poetry which so far has remained unknown. My analysis of their translations of Greek tragedies reveals Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's intense negotiations with the Classics – shedding light on their poetics and asserting their key role in education.

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Long abstract

This thesis deals with poetic translations of Greek tragedy in twentieth-century Italian literature, aiming to intertwine the discourse on poetics with the practice of translation and, in particular, exploring specimens of translations from the Greek tragedies of two twentieth-century Italian authors: Camillo Sbarbaro (1888-1967) and Giovanna Bemporad (1923-2013).

While the thesis deals exclusively with Greek tragedy, I must note that the translations of Greek tragedies are but specific instances of the two poets' wider and systematic relationship with classical literature as a whole. My decision to write a whole dissertation on these two authors – who were also personal friends – stemmed from the consideration that they share essential aesthetic principles, locating translation in the realm of art rather than that of academic scholarship. Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's work on Greek tragedy represents a unique case within the *Novecento* as they developed an approach focussing solely on the linguistic and textual nature of Greek drama, leaving aside the staging process which was instead the object of interest for the whole community of classicists and poets throughout the century. Both Sbarbaro and Bemporad used poetic translation as an occasion to foster a discourse on their poetics, which impacts on their lyrical production.

Sbarbaro theorised a *poetica dell'aderenza* and Bemporad revived the *tradizione filologica-umanistica* for her translations of Greek tragedies, a method that she will only later theorise and apply to the rest of her translations. In light of this, their translations should not be considered mere rewritings, but forms of passionate engagement with the linguistic and cultural nature of the original. It appears that Greek tragedy acted as a poetic

archetype. Through textual and stylistic analysis, archival research and examination of their collected letters, my research shows the fundamental role of the translations of Greek tragedy in these authors' poetic trajectories. The poets were able to deepen their research on topics dear to their literary sensibilities, thus showing the relevance of Greek tragedy to their programmes. In their works, the poet and the translator make up one persona, as through translation they explored new poetic ideas and transferred formal solutions derived from their translations to their creative works and vice versa.

While exploring the intersection between the poets' creative works and their translations of Greek tragedies, my research also addresses the issue of the role of these translations within the complex debate on the legacy of Greek tragedy and on the concept of the tragic in twentieth-century literature. Within a wide scenario which largely drew from the European debate, the poetic translations of Greek tragedies appear to redefine an idea of the tragic within its dramatic form. The poetic translations pursue a middle ground between the poetics of the translator and the reception of tragedy as a genre. This thesis aims to offer a picture of the Italian situation: the study of the poetic translations and of their contribution to the debate on the reception of Greek tragedy is confined to Italian literature and is exemplified in the two case studies on Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad. The research, however, acknowledges the European scale of the debate and signals its relevance to the Italian cultural context. It brings to the fore the question of whether the two poets' translations employ categories of enquiry related to the debate on the tragic, thus aligning themselves with European trends, or they shifted the focus to different aspects. Without neglecting the related polemic concerning poetic translations, fuelled by the eminent philosophical voices of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile and by Classical scholars such as Ettore Romagnoli and Manara Valgimigli, this thesis maintains its primary focus on the presence of Greek tragedy in the poetic trajectories of Sbarbaro and

Bemporad. In particular, as emerges from my analysis, Sbarbaro and Bemporad did not engage with the philosophical debate on the tragic. The analysis of their poetic versions and of the material wherein these translations are referenced or discussed reveals that, just as much as they dismissed any reflection on the theatrical aspects of the text, they did not engage with the philosophical debate on the concept of tragic and preferred to focus on the exclusively linguistic aspects of the text.

The interconnection between these translations and the authors' poetic voices reveals the importance of such undertakings in shaping their individual poetics and modes of stylistic research. Their translations of Greek tragedies show a remarkable degree of interpretative effort. From the analysis of these translations it is possible to derive the poets' understanding of Greek tragedy as a genre and their ideas on the reception of individual tragedies. At the same time, recurring tropes and hidden metaphors emerging from these translations help to understand the importance of some correlated themes in their oeuvres and their complicated intertextuality with the Classical legacy – indeed, a vital force enlivening their poetic discourse as a whole.

In this thesis the authors are for the first time considered in a comparative framework that aims to evaluate two aspects: the contribution of poetic translations to the debate on the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy and the relevance of translations of Greek tragedies in a discourse on authorial identity and development of poetics. This new interpretative outlook allows one to address the study of these translations in the context of the authors' poetic agendas. In addition to this, this thesis brings to the fore unpublished translations of Greek tragedies, thus contributing to a more complete evaluation of the classical legacy in Italy as far as it is concerned with the field of poetic translations.

This thesis is structured in four chapters. The first chapter discusses the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy in the *Novecento* with the purpose of contextualising Camillo

Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad's poetic translations. The scope of this chapter is to highlight how these poets' works represent a complete novelty, so far unknown, among the poet translators of Greek tragedies as well as by comparison with other Italians who devoted their attention to the reception of this genre.

In the second chapter, I analyse Sbarbaro's translations of Greek tragedies and their relevance to his poetic work. Through the study of collections of letters and his thoughts on translation and the Classics, I show how he fostered a methodology for translating Greek tragedy. The literal translation chosen by Sbarbaro to tackle the translation of Greek tragedy is by no means a disengaged way to translate the text. The Italian poet tries to respect the wording of the original as much as possible in an attempt to reproduce the links between the original words and often develops an etymologizing translation. This approach is particularly evident in the lyrical sections where Sbarbaro's poetic memory is most stimulated and responds actively to the original by introducing parallels with themes derived from his creative writing. The choice of poetic prose enables Sbarbaro to alternate the choruses with more prosaic renderings, the dramatic parts, where Sbarbaro's sarcastic and ironic voice is largely developed, still maintaining a consistent tone to the translation as a whole. Literal translation, defined by Sbarbaro as the only possible way to translate Greek tragedy, was expressed by the metaphorical phrase of *camminare sulla corda* and subsequently inspired the metaphor of the poet-transcriber and the image of writing *sotto dettatura*, which we find in his *Fuochi fatui*. The book is a hodge-podge of prose fragments. Written while Sbarbaro was translating Greek tragedies, it contains metapoetic remarks on translation. Sbarbaro's awareness of limited room for personal intervention, during translation, prompted him to reconsider the way in which he conceived of the creative act as such. Stylistic analysis of Sbarbaro's translations of these tragedies not only reveals consonance with his original poetic themes and tropes, but also shows Sbarbaro's choice of

poetic prose both as an appropriate solution for translating the polyphony and variety of metres and registers of Greek tragedy, as a final compromise between lyric and prose long sought throughout his literary career.

In chapter 3, I analyse Giovanna Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedies and their relevance to her poetic production. This chapter is structured similarly to the one on Sbarbaro and aims to offer an exhaustive study on these translations in order to demonstrate their centrality in Bemporad's poetics. Through textual and stylistic analysis of both Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedies and her poetic collection *Esercizi*, I demonstrate recurring themes and tropes in both directions. This study does not aim at being only a sample of comparative stylistics, but it suggests the centrality of these undertakings in Bemporad's work, based as it appears on the constant connection between translation of the Classics and creative writing. These translations date from the 1940s, when Bemporad is finalising the first edition of her *Esercizi*. I suggest we read these translations as a laboratory in which Bemporad establishes and shapes her most distinctive poetic themes and in particular develops a specific interest in the cycle of *Electra*, to which she will remain faithful over the years.

In chapter 4, I discuss Camillo Sbarbaro's and Giovanna Bemporad's teaching experiences. Through the analysis of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's experiences as teachers of Greek and Latin, this chapter aims to offer a perspective on their engagements with the Classical legacy as a crucial complement of their translation activities. Sbarbaro and Bemporad both developed pedagogies in which the classical languages were the enlivening centre, capable of awakening a new wave of *umanesimo*. By creating an atmosphere of persuasion, charisma and intellectual challenge, and by using the Classics, these unconventional teachers aimed at letting the learning experience unfold as a real event in

the student's life, through which he or she developed his/her thoughts independently by gradually discovering his/her real object of interest.

Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's teaching experiences also shed light on the nature of their socio-political agendas, that is on the ways in which their translations of the classics respond to contemporary historical events, commenting on ethics and politics. I am convinced that Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's ethical and political engagement did not prompt their willingness to translate Greek tragedies during the years of Fascism, nor do I think we should look for hidden references to contemporaneous politics in their poetic versions of Sophocles' tragedies. It is their commitment to education and their use of the classics that first of all must be appreciated if we are to understand their *impegno* during this historical period. Both poets aimed at reshaping the role and the function of education through an innovative teaching methodology. The triad of Classics, translation, and poetry is the cornerstone of their teaching. Their interest in Greco-Roman poetry has therefore to be assessed in light of their pedagogical commitment. The classics are not only a source of personal poetic inspiration, but also serve to reassert the vital role of poetry in education.

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Introduction

This thesis deals with the reception of Greek tragedy and its creative influence on the oeuvre and poetics of the 20th-century Italian poets and translators Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad. My analysis concentrates on their poetic translations of Greek tragedies. Selecting from a number of translations of Greek tragedies they completed in the 1940s, I particularly focus on Sbarbaro's version of Sophocles' *Antigone* and on Bemporad's rendering of Sophocles' *Electra*. While I argue that their versions of Sophocles are representative of a wider engagement with the tragic genre, in the monographic chapters devoted to Sbarbaro and Bemporad I also demonstrate how both authors developed a fascination of sorts with the mythical cycles treated in the tragedies of *Antigone* and *Electra*. My analysis of their appropriations demonstrates that both authors conceived the translations of Sophocles' plays as an occasion to explore their poetic voices, hence charging translation with creative and inspirational meanings. I therefore trace the influence and effects of these translations on their original opuses as a whole and the shaping of their poetic personae. As a result, my analysis sheds new light on Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic worlds and on their relationship with the classical legacy.

My decision to analyse these two authors together is informed by a fundamental analogy between them. By comparison with other 20th-century Italian poets who devoted their attention to translation of Greek tragedies – for example Pier Paolo Pasolini, Salvatore Quasimodo and Edoardo Sanguineti –, Sbarbaro and Bemporad stand out for a wholly peculiar approach to the dramatic texts. While all other poets produced translations for performance's sake, and devoted a great deal of attention to the cultural implications of the tragic texts on stage, Sbarbaro and Bemporad focussed purely on the textual dimension of tragedy, neglecting the theatrical component of the translated text.

Such similar approaches reflect the influence the translation experience had on their lyrical dimension. While for other poets, translating Greek tragedies spurred an interest in dramatic writing *per se* or informed novel ideologies on the Classics, Sbarbaro and Bemporad's engagement with Greek drama was a significant moment in the formation of their individual poetic awarenesses. Their versions of the Sophoclean dramas do not address the theatrical components of the text nor show any consideration of the staging process. Similarly, no evidence of an ideological/political interest in the use of the tragic paradigm is found in their translations or in the sources where such versions are referenced and/or discussed. Moreover, my analysis of their translations and of their creative production finds no attempt to rewrite the genre or other mimetic endeavours. There is also a further difference when considering Sbarbaro and Bemporad in comparison to other poet-translators of Greek tragedies. All primary critical studies on Greek tragedy and its reception cross paths with the philosophical debate on the concept of the tragic. As Peter Szondi has notably pinpointed in his seminal essay on the tragic, the stark separation of the concept from the genre has a tradition of its own and speculation on this theme progresses alongside the intellectual advancement of the discipline of dialectics.¹ As I state in chapter 1 of this thesis, both Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's appropriations of Greek tragedies can be considered to stand entirely outside this critical approach. While their poetic translations of Greek tragedies appear to redefine an idea of the tragic within its dramatic form, their approach actually focuses solely on the linguistic and textual nature of the original.

On the basis of these characteristic analogies between the two authors, I decided to examine Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations in a comparative framework. Studying these authors together not only helps us to appreciate the use of translation as a creative and poetically inspiring tool in connection with the use of the tragic paradigm, but

¹Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.1.

also unearths a novel approach within the wider scenario of the modes of reception of Greek tragedy in 20th century Italian literature.

Poetic translations of Greek tragedies in 20th-century Italian literature are largely understudied and, when the opposite is true, scholarship unfailingly addresses works of individual authors and never attempts comparative outlooks. A recent attempt to signal the need for a more comprehensive study on the role of poets in the reception of the tragic genre in Italy has been offered by the work of Paolo Zoboli. An invaluable tool, as well as a source of inspiration for my study, Paolo Zoboli's *La rinascita della tragedia. Le versioni dei tragici greci da D'Annunzio a Pasolini* first highlighted the necessity of addressing the Italian reception of Greek tragedy by taking into account all the contributors, namely classicists, philosophers, professional and non professional translators and poets.² This monograph is the only available study aiming at evaluating the impact of translation activity on the 20th-century Italian reception of Greek tragedy. By offering a comparative discussion of two poet translators' engagement with Greek tragedy via the practice of translation my study not only complements Zoboli's research but it also enriches the picture of the Italian response to the genre, covering an uncharted area of study. While this thesis does not address the Italian reception of Sophocles *per se*, my research nonetheless contributes to a widening of the current understanding of the reception of Sophoclean tragedy in the Italian *Novecento*. This thesis therefore provides a fresh perspective on the poetic engagement with Greek tragedy of two authors who have so far been neglected by scholarship.

As far as Sbarbaro is concerned, the only existing scholarly contribution to his work as translator of Greek tragedies is Zoboli's monograph *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*.³ This

² Paolo Zoboli, *La rinascita della tragedia. Le versioni della tragedia greca da D'Annunzio a Pasolini* (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2004).

³ Paolo Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005).

fundamental study offers a detailed analysis of the poet's translations of Greek tragedies and Euripides' satyr play *Cyclops*. Although the book discusses the aforementioned translations on a number of levels (philologically, textually and stylistically), the overarching argument aims at separating the poet's versions of Greek tragedies from that of the satyr play. Starting from the assumption that a poetic translation can only be defined as such when the poet aims to create a work of his own, Zoboli claims that Sbarbaro engaged on a poetic level only when he translated Euripides' *Cyclops*. In a word, Zoboli does not consider Sbarbaro's versions of Sophocles' and Aeschylus' as moments of critical poetic engagement in Sbarbaro's personal poetic trajectory. Without undermining Zoboli's findings on Sbarbaro's appropriation of Euripides' *Cyclops*, I challenge this interpretation. In chapter 2 of my thesis, I demonstrate the poetic engagement and significance of Sbarbaro's versions of Greek tragedies. For the first time, my thesis locates Sbarbaro's translations of Greek tragedies in relation to another fellow poet and translator. The aim of this comparison is to set the foundation for a wider reflection on the meaning of the use of the tragic genre in connection with the practice of poetic translation.

As far as Bemporad is concerned, my research aims at setting the foundation for future and more comprehensive studies of her work, which could properly evaluate her relentless commitment as translator and poet within the 20th-century Italian canon. Currently, to the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive scholarship on Bemporad's work as a poet and translator of the Classics. By taking her translations of Greek tragedies as a case study of a much wider engagement with the Classics, my thesis is the first scholarly attempt to address Bemporad's work as a means of negotiating her (still marginal) place in the Italian literature canon. In addition to this, my thesis examines the role of a corpus of unpublished translations of Greek tragedies which I personally discovered during archival research in 2012. This work therefore not only addresses her

output as a poet-translator of the Classics with a specific and completely novel focus on her poetic versions of Greek tragedies, but also places her in dialogue with another poet who experienced translation of Greek tragedies as a moment of poetic awareness. My analysis reveals the importance and the influence of this early undertaking on Bemporad's poetic collection *Esercizi*.

I should mention that my research greatly benefited from my personal connection with Bemporad, which I established in December 2011. We met in her house in Rome and continued to dialogue on a regular basis until her death on the 6th of January 2013. I discussed with Bemporad how poetic translation became an activity wherein her own poetic voice shines brightest, which explains her relentless effort to translate almost the entire canon of Western literature and her decision to write only one book of poems, the *Esercizi*. After Bemporad's death, I had the opportunity to continue to research her private archive, of which I produced a preliminary catalogue. During this research, I discovered the manuscripts of her translations of Greek tragedies, a completely unpublished corpus dating to the 1940s. I began my study of these early translations, which I examine in chapter 3 of this thesis, and placed them in context within Bemporad's poetic production and her work as a translator from the Classics. My analysis of this new corpus of translation calls for a reassessment of Bemporad's work as a translator of the Classics and for a more comprehensive discussion of her translations as a whole, and a general reappraisal of her legacy in the most recent Italian tradition.

The decision of Sbarbaro and Bemporad to translate Greek tragedy in the chaotic years of the 1940s prompts the unavoidable questions of whether their poetic versions of Greek tragedies responded to contemporary historical events and whether they can be read as political and ethical commentaries on the events of WW2. I concluded that the historical circumstances remained somewhat secondary and marginal in these poets' thoughts. As

emerges from an analysis of their translations and from all the other sources wherein these works are referenced, Sbarbaro and Bemporad did not use their works as an occasion to express their oppositions to the regime. Instead, they reasserted the necessity of poetry by continuing their poetic quest and by embarking on an intense pedagogic programme which had the teaching of Classics at its heart. Camillo Sbarbaro, who privately tutored pupils in Greek and Latin throughout his life, intensified his educational activity when he fled to Borsana (a small inland village nearby Spotorno) during the bombing. Bemporad, as a teacher of Greek and Latin, supported Pier Paolo Pasolini's foundation of the "Scuola irregolare di Versuta", which provided education to students who could not afford to go to school in the war years. This thesis therefore investigates, for the first time, the interconnections between Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's didactic engagements and their ideas of the function of Classical poetry in education. In different manners, both poets fostered an approach where the translation of the classics held a creative role within the learning process. Teaching and translating the Classics appear to be moments of poetic inspiration and creativity as well as a social and ethical commitment.

My work combines a comparative approach with historical and textual analysis methodology. I have avoided applying a fixed theoretical framework as I believe in a method which starts from close reading and analysis of the texts and then derives its interpretative categories from a scrutiny of these results. Among the ever-growing scholarship on translation studies, I have selected the theoretical works of authors who focused on the poetic significance of the translation practice.⁴ The novelty and originality of my study is twofold. The comparative framework provides a fresh perspective on two poets who are here studied together for the first time. At the same time, the two poets' works are investigated through the new focus of poetic translation of the tragic genre. In addition to

⁴ As I discuss in the relevant chapters of this thesis, the works of Giacomo Leopardi, Yves Bonnefoy, Antoine Berman and Walter Benjamin informed my discussion of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations.

this, thanks to my archival research, I bring to the fore and discuss original and completely unpublished material.

The thesis is structured in four chapters. The first chapter offers a historical contextualization of Bemporad and Sbarbaro's translations while placing them in dialogue with other translator-poets who dealt with the tragic genre. The second and third chapters are structured similarly and they discuss, respectively, Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations in detail. In chronological order, in chapter 2, I discuss Sbarbaro's version of Sophocles' *Antigone* and its relationship with his poetic opus. In chapter 3, I focus on Bemporad's version of Sophocles' *Electra* and investigate its influence on her poetic work. In chapter 4, I offer a novel perspective on Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's didactic commitments with the aim of highlighting how their engagement with the Classics held an ethical significance in their literary views. The chapter is divided in two broad sections. In the first section I consider Sbarbaro's pedagogic commitment both from an historical and from an interpretative perspective. I analyse, for the first time in Sbarbaro's scholarship, the poet's thoughts on didactics, tracing a connection between the practice of translation, the role assigned to the Classics in education and his poetic work. In the second section, I focus on Bemporad's experience as a teacher of Classics in Pier Paolo Pasolini's school and take into account how this experience had a lasting influence in Bemporad's negotiation of Classical literature. My analysis of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's didactic experience reveals a common thread unifying the way in which they conceived the role of Classics in education. Both poets assigned the Classics an ethical and creative function whereby translation played a key role within the process of awakening the students' creativity. I then conclude by summarising my findings with the aim of highlighting the *fil rouge* unifying Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's relationships with the Classics as it emerges from the joint study of their poetic translations of Greek tragedies and of their pedagogical commitments.

Chapter 1

The poetic translations of Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad in context: the reception of Greek tragedy in the Italian *Novecento*

This chapter aims to review the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy in the 20th century, contextualising Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad's poetic translations. Paolo Zoboli's seminal book *La rinascita della tragedia. Le versioni della tragedia greca da D'Annunzio a Pasolini* first drew attention to the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy with a specific focus on translation. Targeting a chronological span of sixty years (1900-1960), this study highlighted an ever-increasing number of translations of Greek tragedy, identifying a peak in the 30s. In light of remarkable numbers, appropriately recorded in a *regesto* at the end of the monograph, Zoboli argued for a rebirth of the genre in 20th century Italy, assigning a key role to translation. For the purposes of my research, the value of Zoboli's study rests on his analysis of the historical context and of the most prominent contemporary figures dealing with the classical reception. He considered such important classical scholars such as Ettore Romagnoli and Manara Valgimigli and devoted significant attention to Benedetto Croce's and Giovanni Gentile's debate on poetic translation. *La Rinascita della tragedia* is therefore a fundamental study if one is to appreciate the breadth and the diversity of the reception of Greek tragedy in the Italian *Novecento*.

Zoboli's work also underlined the lack, and therefore the necessity, of a study discussing poetic translations of Greek tragedy and their role in such a debate. Poetic translations of Greek tragedy nonetheless still await critical attention, although they represent a quantitatively smaller practice when compared to the tens and tens of professional and amateur translators of Greek tragedy in Zoboli's catalogue.

The most evident analogy between poetic and non-poetic translations of Greek tragedy is an engagement with theatrical performance. Poets, like the majority of classical scholars, translated for the theatre. While the overarching argument of this thesis

addresses the contribution of poets to the reception of Greek tragedy by taking into account the case-studies of Camillo Sbarbaro's and Giovanna Bemporad's translations, the scope of this chapter is to highlight how these poets' work represent a complete novelty, so far unknown, among the poet translators of Greek tragedy. By abstaining from any kind of interaction with the stage, Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic versions stand out within a period that witnessed the collaboration of scholars and poets with the *Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico* (INDA) and its festivals. In light of this partnership, which characterized the entire century, the first section of this chapter explores the influence exerted by the work of a poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and that of a classical philologist, Ettore Romagnoli, on the reception of Greek tragedy.

Gabriele D'Annunzio's *La rinascenza della tragedia* (1897), with its call to poets to revive Greek tragedy in ancient theatres was enabled by the creation of the *Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico* (INDA), based in Syracuse (1914). The classical philologist Ettore Romagnoli played a paramount role in the creation of INDA and translated a significant number of tragedies for the Syracuse festivals. Romagnoli's interest in translation and his active commitment to the representation of Greek tragedy as part of a cultural ritual was an exceptional case. The Italian academia, the official institution for the transmission of classical antiquity, had a conflicting approach towards the 'rebirth' and the role of translations. By considering the works of three distinguished classical scholars, Giorgio Pasquali, Manara Valgimigli e Gennaro Perrotta, I intend to highlight the twofold attitude of classical philology. Classicists did not dismiss occasional collaboration with INDA. However, they remained firmly anchored to the principles of historical philology, which considered translation solely a practical activity not to be encouraged *per se* without a solid knowledge of Classical literature and civilization. In addition to this, the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile - very influential among the community of classical

scholars - held translation, especially that of poetry, as an almost impossible act not deserving any theoretical speculation or particular critical attention.

The Italian reception of Greek tragedy is profoundly indebted to the Contemporary European cultural scene, especially to the major evolution undergone by classical scholarship during the 19th and 20th-centuries. Both historical philology (Pasquali) and the approach inspired by Aestheticism (D'Annunzio and Romagnoli) owe their models to the European intellectual scene, of which the second section of this chapter will outline the major trends.

Mapping the impact that the European cultural scene had on the classical reception in Italy allows for the discussion of another major aspect concerning the reception of Greek tragedy in 20th-century literature: the concept of tragic. A philosophical category that found its origin within the tradition of German Idealism, this concept crosses the path of the reception of Greek tragedy in many ways. Understanding the scope and the influence that such a category had on the Italian scene is fundamental to situate Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations in relation to the critical debate on the tragic.

In the third and last section of this chapter, I will compare the approach of other Italian poets who translated Greek tragedy in the 20th-century (Pier Paolo Pasolini, Salvatore Quasimodo, and Edoardo Sanguineti)¹ with that employed by Sbarbaro and Bemporad, highlighting analogies and differences. While appearing to be part of a wider movement, Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's versions constitute a counter-trend against the most common tendency of translating for the stage. I find particularly relevant to my approach Yves Bonnefoy's considerations on the nature of the tragic text and the challenges it poses to a poet translator. Bonnefoy suggested that the only interpretation capable of reactivating the dialogic nature, thus the performativity of the tragic text, relies

¹ Partial translations of Greek tragedy are excluded from this analysis.

on a rhythmical quest. Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's translations, which focused solely on the text, indeed addressed the dialogical nature of tragedy as expressed by Bonnefoy. By finding a new rhythm, Sbarbaro and Bemporad experienced the translation of Greek tragedy as a means by which to explore the potential of their own poetic abilities. Indeed, nothing for the stage.

1.0 Greek tragedy on stage: Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Rinascenza della tragedia*, the INDA project and the contribution of classical scholarship

The reopening ceremony of the Roman Theatre of Orange (1869), after its partial restoration, and the performance of Sophocles' *Antigone* profoundly inspired Gabriele D'Annunzio. The influence of this performance on D'Annunzio's poetic imagination emerges in his emblematic pamphlet *La rinascenza della tragedia*, written a few years later (1987):

[...] Oggi risonano ancora i versi dei tragedi e scrosciano gli applausi della moltitudine assisa nell'ordine dei gradi aperti sotto il cielo estivo. Costruito contro il fianco petroso d'un colle, a simiglianza del Teatro di Dioniso contro il fianco dell'acropoli ateniese, il vasto e fulvo monumento aduna nei suoi cerchi una gente diversa, convenuta quivi dai borghi prossimi e dalle città lontane per udire la lamentazione d'Antigone e l'ululo delle Erinni. [...] Ho voluto rappresentare questo avvenimento straordinario – che forse passerà sotto silenzio in Italia ove ogni gusto della cultura è smarrito – poiché mi sembra significativo come indizio d'una tendenza nuova, come annuncio di un impreveduto risveglio nello spirito latino, che finalmente riconosce tra la nebbia estranea di cui si era avvolto i segni dell'antica luce.²

It is evident that revived representations of Greek tragedy in ancient theatres held a symbolic meaning for D'Annunzio: the poet saw not only the rebirth of a genre but also that of a community assembling for a ritual event.³ The arrival of *gente diversa*, from neighbourhoods and cities to listen to Antigone's lament reminded D'Annunzio of the

² Gabriele D'Annunzio, *La rinascenza della tragedia* in «La Tribuna», 02.08.1987 now in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, II vols, 2, (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), p. 262, (pp. 262-265). On D'Annunzio's theatre see Valentina Valentini, *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea. Sul teatro di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1992), especially the chapter *Il teatro moderno di Gabriele D'Annunzio*, pp. 11-58.

³ Valentini, *Popolo e coro* in *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, p. 45 highlighted how D'Annunzio used the term 'popolo' alluding to the anthropological dimension according to which the primitive coincides with the childhood of mankind.

Athenian crowd, coming from the polis and its districts to celebrate the festivals in which Greek tragedy was originally performed. The excerpt is imbued with references to ancient Greece and its cultural festivals. D'Annunzio read Greek tragedy festivals as the powerful archetype on which Italian modernity (the one that descended from Rome, as the phrase “spirito latino” suggests) should mould its own cultural events. He felt that his duty was to encourage Italy to follow such an example, thus reconnecting the history of Rome to that of ancient Greece. As Zoboli rightly pointed out, behind the reference to the reawakening of the *spirito latino* in opposition to the *nebbia estranea* is to be read as an allusion to the polemic of Friederich Nietzsche on Richard Wagner's Bayreuth theatre.⁴ Following Nietzsche's ‘il faut méditerranéiser la musique’, D'Annunzio did reclaim the Mediterranean context of tragedy.⁵ He went as far as to promote an actual programme for the rebirth of Greek tragedy in Italy, where poets had a leading role:

[...] l'opera drammatica [*sic*] resta l'unica forma vitale con cui i poeti possono manifestarsi alla folla e darle la rivelazione della Bellezza, comunicarle i sogni virili ed eroici che trasfigurano subitamente la vita. Sarà gloria dei poeti risollevar quella forma a dignità primitiva, infondendole l'antico spirito religioso.⁶

In the *opera drammatica*, namely Greek tragedy, D'Annunzio identified the only possibility of a dialogue between poets and the rest of the community. Such a dialogue is possible only if the genre is brought back to the ritual dimension of its origins. Modern poets, therefore, must resurrect the ritual function of the *parola tragica*. Towards the end of *La Rinascenza*, D'Annunzio quotes Aeschylus' lines: “Colui che canta al dio un canto di speranza, vedrà

⁴ Valentini, *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, p. 31 and then Zoboli, *La rinascita della tragedia*, p. 23, highlighted that D'Annunzio here refers to Friederich Nietzsche's polemic with Richard Wagner, expressed in *The Case of Wagner* now in Friederich Nietzsche translated by Walter Kaufman, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage, 1976), p.159. On the influence exerted by Wagner on D'Annunzio's work see Vincenzo Borghetti; Riccardo Pecci, *Il bacio della sfinge: D'Annunzio, Pizzetti e Fedra* (Turin: E.D.T. Istituto Nazionale Tostiano, 1998). More generally, on the influence of Wagner's art on Italian literature see Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, *Musica e letteratura in Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Milan: Sansoni, 2000), pp. 131-66: 163. D'Annunzio discussed Wagner's work in three articles: *Nella vita e nell'arte. Il caso Wagner I, II, III* «La Tribuna», 23.07. 1893, 03.08. 1893, 09.08.1893 now D'in Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, 2, pp. 233-261.

⁵ Zoboli, *La rinascita della tragedia*, p. 23.

⁶ D'Annunzio, *La rinascenza della tragedia*, p. 265.

compiersi il suo voto”.⁷ Ultimately, the *Rinascenza della tragedia* is to be read as a sort of religious vow.

Although the modes in which Italian poets ought to make Greek tragedy live again were not specified, it is evident that performance in ancient theatrical sites occupied a critical role in D’Annunzio’s project. The theatrical performance signified the reenactment of the cultural rite. Specifically, D’Annunzio was very keen on Greco-Roman theatres in Italy. The poet’s trips to Greece, prior to the writing of *La rinascenza della tragedia*, had a significant impact on his poetic imagination and on his project. By 1897 - when *Rinascenza della tragedia* was first issued - the poet had already completed his first visit to Greece (1895). D’Annunzio participated in the ceremony celebrating the discovery of Delphi’s charioteer with an oration titled *Discorso agli Ateniesi* (1898)⁸ proclaiming the sisterhood between Greek and the Italian languages. During another visit to Greece with Eleonora Duse (1899), he wrote a memorable letter to Pietro Treves describing the epiphany he had in Mycenae: his mission was to make the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides live again in Italian culture.⁹ The Latin theatre in Albano, conceived as the Italian, and consequently Mediterranean, answer to Wagner’s theatre (opened in Bayreuth in the year 1876), was supposed to be the place where D’Annunzio would revive the work of ancient tragedians.¹⁰ D’Annunzio advertised his ‘new’ mission with an extensive campaign on the cultural pages of Italian and European newspapers in order to attract public interest.¹¹ His

⁷ D’Annunzio, *La rinascenza della tragedia*, p. 265.

⁸ Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Discorso agli Ateniesi* in «Il Marzocco», 28.05.1898 now in Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, 2, pp. 460-463.

⁹ In Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Lettere ai Treves* ed. by Gianni Oliva, collaborazione di Katia Berardi e Barbara di Serio (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), pp. 167-168. Valentini, *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, pp.109-110, and Zoboli, *La rinascita*, p. 9, first drew attention to the importance of this letter.

¹⁰ Valentini, *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, p. 25.

¹¹ D’Annunzio’s theatrical commitment prompted a conspicuous number of reviews and articles. On this see Anna Baldazzi, *Bibliografia della critica dannunziana nei periodici italiani dal 1880 al 1938* (Rome: Cooperativa scrittori, 1977), especially pp. 89-98, covering the years 1898-1900.

enthusiasm for the rebirth of Greek tragedy stimulated visible effects also on his work as a playwright.¹²

The poet never translated a Greek tragedy nor did he accomplish his project for the Albano theatre.¹³ His tragic engagement, in the end, remained prophetic. Indeed, the reception of Greek tragedy in the 20th-century Italy was to be mainly a history of dramatic performances in festivals. However, the rebirth of Greek tragedy, as we will see, did not happen thanks to the work of poets, as D'Annunzio had hoped.

It was mostly due to the work of a classical philologist, Ettore Romagnoli, that Greek tragedy was reintroduced into Italian theatres. Romagnoli is a key figure if one is to understand the interconnection of translation and theatre in the reception of Greek tragedy in 20th-century Italian literature. Romagnoli's work has three fundamental merits. Firstly, he was extraordinarily committed to bring Greek tragedy back to the stage. Romagnoli played a paramount role in the foundation of the National Institute of Ancient Drama (INDA) at the Greek theatre in Syracuse. Secondly, his work as a translator was unprecedented: Romagnoli translated the whole canon of Greek poetry, devoting particular attention to Greek tragedy, besides most Greek poetry. Thirdly, Romagnoli devoted significant attention to the theorization of translation as practice.

According to Romagnoli, the revival of Greek tragedy restored the tragic genre to its origins. In an essay on Greek music (1905), Romagnoli pinpointed the origin of Greek tragedy in these terms:

I Greci ebbero dunque dalla musica la rivelazione nubilosa e balenante d'uno stato sovrumano più intenso e vibratile. Indi la concezione d'una umanità eletta che sempre ardesse di quella vita, che parlasse sempre quel linguaggio alato: indi la origine della tragedia, che presenta in forma obiettiva quella umanità ideale. In questi limiti la tragedia è figlia della musica. Bene Federico Nietzsche ne ebbe l'intuizione ma la mortificò poi fin da principio, inserendovi il

¹² On the influence exerted by Greek tragedy on D'Annunzio's theatre see Valentini, *Travestire il moderno d'antico: Conti, la Grecia e i simbolisti* in *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, pp. 31-34. In the same volume, a rich bibliography on D'Annunzio's theatre, pp. 335-346.

¹³ On the theatre of Albano see Valentini, *La tragedia moderna e mediterranea*, pp. 13-14.

germe della dottrina schopenaueriana. Dunque, la musica dà la forma a ogni genere di poesia, suggerisce gli spunti e i voli alla lirica, ispira l'anima alla tragedia.¹⁴

Evidently indebted to Nietzsche's work, this excerpt depicts the importance attributed by Romagnoli to the relationship between music and tragedy.¹⁵ Romagnoli wanted to recreate this connection in modern performance. His first translation for the INDA clearly shows this agenda. In 1914 he translated, directed and composed the music for the choirs of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* for the opening of the INDA and its festivals of Greek tragedy in Syracuse.¹⁶ This was a turning point for the reception of the tragic genre in Italy: the festival had an enormous impact on the public and has remained successful throughout the whole 20th century to this day. Dramatic performances of Greek tragedies in the Greek theatre of Syracuse held a symbolic meaning: Greek tragedy was celebrated as the core of classical civilization as a whole, the most refined expression of Greek culture. Moreover, through this project Romagnoli also had the opportunity to propose his *moderno concetto di ellenismo*:

È dissipata la nebbia dalle nostre pupille. Quasi ogni opera letteraria dell'Ellade lascia cadere il suo drappeggiamento classico, e rivela, ora, la viva sprezzatura popolaesca, ora l'accesa policromia o la sognante sfumatura romantica.¹⁷

Interestingly, Romagnoli opposed all Classicizing or neoclassical interpretation, ultimately resting on Winckelmann's reading of ancient art.¹⁸ Romagnoli's translations and staging of Greek tragedy in INDA's festivals - inspired by his *moderno concetto di ellenismo* -

¹⁴ Ettore Romagnoli, *La musica greca*, "La nuova antologia", s. IV, CXVI [CC], 1905, 800, pp. 650-72 now in *Musica e poesia nell'antica Grecia* (Bari: Laterza, 1911), p.41.

¹⁵ Friederich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 13-116.

¹⁶ Zoboli, *La Rinascita della tragedia*, p. 126.

¹⁷ Ettore Romagnoli, *Nel Regno d'Orfeo. Studi sulla lirica e la musica greca* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921), p. 11. The concept of 'moderno ellenismo' had been the object of a *Prolusione* at the University of Catania in 1906, entitled *Il moderno concetto dell'Ellenismo*.

¹⁸ For a concise overview of the various types of classicisms see Luigi Enrico Rossi, *Umanesimo e filologia (A proposito della Storia della filologia classica di Rudolf Pfeiffer)* in «Riv. Di fil.» 104, 1976, 98-117. On this aspect see also Luciano Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980).

promoted a new way of interpreting Greek antiquity, which found its guiding principles in the cultural agenda of Aestheticism and Romanticism. Romagnoli's Nietzschean opposition to Classicism, as we will see, was not unique to him. The entire community of classical scholars, as well as poets who dealt with classical reception, challenged the model of Classicism and called for a different approach.

The agonal structure of INDA proposed by Romagnoli in the wake of ancient competitions, prompted an outpouring of translations. A special series was created with the purpose of hosting the translations of the tragedies staged at INDA. Romagnoli worked relentlessly as a translator, overseeing almost all the tragedies staged at INDA up to 1928.¹⁹ Such a commitment was the practical realization of Romagnoli's ideas on the task of translator. He believed that every period has its own translators.²⁰ The vitality of the classical paradigm is therefore strictly dependent on the historical nature of language. Interpreters, commentators and translators are fundamental mediators in this process.²¹ The translator is the most important figure, the best version of the commentator. The translator is, in Romagnoli's view, the "Demiurge" throughout the ages and only in virtue of his work can classical poetry be transmitted to modernity.

In accordance with his theories, Romagnoli chose verse rather than prose for translation. For him, rhythmical evolution is the sole connection between past and present:

[...] il verso, dalla uniformità ritmica originale, ha aspirato, a mano a mano, alla libera modulazione, alla omniritmia. In nessuna forma l'aspirazione ha trovato compimento più perfetto che nell'endecasillabo, il quale, nella generica cornice giambica, fissata e solidamente mantenuta dai due accenti delle sedi principali, permette la combinazione e il contrasto di tutti gli altri disegni ritmici.²²

¹⁹ In terms of quantity, his work equals that of Felice Bellotti who, in 19th century, translated the entire corpus of Greek poetry.

²⁰ Romagnoli, *La diffusione della cultura classica in Vigilie Italiane* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1919), p. 89.

²¹ On the evolution of Greek rhythm see Romagnoli, *La musica greca* in *Nel regno di Orfeo*, especially pp. 167-171.

²² Ettore Romagnoli, *Musica e poesia nell'antica Grecia* (Bari: Laterza, 1911), p. 317.

As is evident from this passage, rhythm is the point of connection between different historical periods. The hendecasyllable is chosen verse not only in virtue of its rhythm flexibility, but especially because it is considered the final result of the evolution of the iambic trimeter. In other words, the hendecasyllable is the symbol of the historical development of the ancient verse. Like the translator, rhythmical evolution is the “Demiurge” allowing communication between different historical stages.

Romagnoli’s positions on the role of the translator triggered a vigorous debate in the Italian cultural scene. His perspective was in stark contrast both with the standpoint of the most prominent exponents of Idealism and with classical historical philology. It is worth briefly considering Benedetto Croce’s and Giovanni Gentile’s positions on translation. George Steiner, in his well-known periodization of translation, placed Croce’s thought in the period of untranslatability.²³ To fully understand Croce’s positions on the matter of poetic translation one has to consider the separation between the work of art and everything else, between what is poetry and what is not, which is at the heart of Croce’s aesthetics. In his *L’estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale. Teoria e storia* (1902), the philosopher described poetic translation as follows:

La traduzione, che si dice buona, è un’approssimazione, che ha valore originario di opera d’arte e può stare da sé.²⁴

This excerpt shows how Croce did not conceive poetic translations possible, because as soon as they came into existence, they immediately became works of their own. Things change for prose texts. In his *Poesia* (1936), Croce admitted translation as far as prose texts are concerned:

²³ George Steiner, *After Babel* (London New York Toronto: OUP, 1975), p. 244.

²⁴ Benedetto Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale. Teoria e storia*, ed. by G. Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1990), p. 87.

Non v'ha dubbio che la sfera in cui ha luogo il tradurre sia quella dell'espressione prosastica, che si adempie per simboli e segni. Questi segni sono permutabili, secondo che torna comodo; e non solo quelli della matematica, della fisica e delle altre scienze, ma anche quelli della filosofia e della storia.²⁵

The untranslatability of poetry is underscored even more strongly in this passage where translation is confined to the realm of prose and its essence compared to the more general concept of exchange.

Giovanni Gentile developed Croce's positions in the *Estetica* even more radically. Beginning from the assumption that language is not a fact but an act, Gentile arrived at a conclusion which is a complete aporia. In his study *Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione*, Domenico Jervolino highlighted the underlying contradiction at the heart of Gentile's ideas on translation:

Gentile sottolinea che la lingua, in quanto nella sua concretezza è il parlare, non è fatto (oggetto della conoscenza del grammatico e del glottologo) ma è atto, come qualsiasi forma di vita dello spirito. Intesa la lingua in questo modo, essa è una sola, sicché si può arrivare a due conclusioni opposte che sono come le facce di una medaglia: noi non traduciamo mai, perché l'unica lingua è quella vivente; noi traduciamo sempre, perché "la lingua vera, sonante nell'animo umano, non è mai la stessa, né anche in due istanti consecutivi; ed esiste a condizione di trasformarsi, continuamente inquieta, viva".²⁶

In so doing, Gentile enormously broadened the field of translation – as Steiner highlighted²⁷ – thus directly challenging Croce's positions on the matter, as we can judge from this excerpt:

Tradurre, in verità, è la condizione d'ogni pensare e d'ogni apprendere; e non si traduce soltanto, come si dice empiricamente parlando e presupponendo così lingue diverse, da una lingua straniera nella nostra, ma si traduce altresì dalla nostra, sempre: e non soltanto dalla nostra dei secoli remoti e degli scrittori di cui siamo lettori, ma anche dalla nostra più recente.²⁸

²⁵ Croce, *La Poesia* (Bari: Laterza, 1953⁵), p. 103.

²⁶ Domenico Jervolino, *Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione* in Giuseppe Cacciatore; Girolamo Cotroneo; Renata Viti Cavaliere eds., *Croce filosofo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi in occasione del 50 anniversario della morte* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 2 vols, II, p.436, (pp. 431-441).

²⁷ Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 251.

²⁸ I quote from Jervolino, *Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione*, p. 436.

Such positions were discussed in a more organic way in *Il diritto e il torto delle traduzioni* (1920).²⁹ Gentile founded the futility of translation in the prejudice of considering the work of spirit as a fact and justified the right to translate as an extension of every form of human intellect. Croce's and Gentile's considerations on translation are deeply grounded in their philosophical system.³⁰ Overall, they did not encourage the debate on poetic translation as practice.³¹ Both philosophers, after having framed translation as an aporia or having dissolved it within the eternal evolution of language, restrained critical interest in translation of poetic texts and its theoretical implications.

In *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du loin*, Antoine Berman devotes an entire chapter - *L'emprise philologique* - to the effects of the "philological power".³² By the *emprise philologique*, Berman alludes to the hegemonic control of classical philology over the hermeneutics of ancient texts. From his viewpoint, such hegemony can produce a paralysis in communication which prevents other forms of interpretations the text might prompt.³³ Without rejecting the value of textual criticism, Berman observes the necessity of not confining translation to the philologists' technical expertise. Berman's observations on the *emprise philologique* accurately capture the situation of classical reception in the Italian *Novecento* and its relationship with translation. Romagnoli's unremitting dedication to translation was an *unicum* in the Italian academia which was substantially oriented towards the *emprise philologique*. Giorgio Pasquali, a leading figure of classical scholarship in 20th-century Italy, in a time of an ever increasing practice of translation proposed an

²⁹ Giovanni Gentile, *Il diritto e il torto delle traduzioni* in *Frammenti di estetica e letteratura* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1920), pp. 369-375.

³⁰ Jervolino, *Croce, Gentile e Gramsci sulla traduzione*, p. 437: "Come si vede, in entrambi i filosofi la soluzione all'aporia del tradurre ripropone l'ispirazione di fondo del sistema filosofico: da una parte la filosofia dei distinti, dall'altra l'unità dell'atto spirituale. Questo conferma la rilevanza teoretica della questione, apparentemente marginale, della traduzione."

³¹ On this topic, apart from Zoboli, *La speculazione filosofica: Croce e Gentile* in *La rinascita della tragedia*, pp. 73-79, see also Simone Giusti, *Tradurre per comprendere: Gobetti tra Croce e Gentile* in Simone Giusti, *La congiura stabilita. Dialoghi e comparazioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Milan: Francoangeli, 2005), pp. 39-53.

³² Antoine Berman, *L'emprise philologique* in *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du loin* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1999), p. 118.

³³ Berman, *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du loin*, p. 119.

opposing philological method based on “l’interpretazione storica dei testi e nella storia della cultura”.³⁴ Pasquali conceived translation as only one of the aspects through which the whole text analysis could be articulated. In any case, translation remained but a shadow of the original text:

le traduzioni dai classici possono aspirare a risuscitare nel lettore moderno un’ombra dell’impressione estetica che l’originale produce su chi gli si accosti con preparazione adeguata.³⁵

Pasquali asserts that a historical and linguistic knowledge of the *original* language are the sole lens through which to study classical civilization. Pasquali’s polemical stand against the ‘explosion’ of translations from the Classics follows naturally from this belief:

Negli ultimi anni il numero delle traduzioni, certo per effetto dell’esempio più che dell’insegnamento del Fraccaroli e del Romagnoli [...], è cresciuta a dismisura. Ve ne sono di genere varissimo. Traduzioni poetiche da poesia, alcune tali che il testo greco sembra aver fornito un comodo pretesto, uno spunto per tirar giù versi italiani, brutti i più com’era da attendersi, altre, opera coscienziosa d’interprete, cui le Muse sono state tuttavia avare del loro favore; rare quelle nelle quali senso della lingua poetica italiana e comprensione esatta del testo si diano la mano. [...] Omero, Eschilo, Sofocle, Pindaro, sono stati più spesso tradotti quanto, come avremo occasioni di dire, meno studiati: per un autore così difficile qual’è Eschilo, i risultati sono particolarmente pietosi. Traduzioni in prosa, talvolta in prosa d’arte, da testi poetici: spesso l’originale stampato a fronte. Sono lavori che si propongono di rendere accessibili a un pubblico mezzanamente colto non del tutto sprovvisto di nozioni di greco, i capolavori degli antichi senza soffocarli di note.³⁶

³⁴ Gennaro Perrotta, *Intelligenza di Giorgio Pasquali, Primato*, IV, I, 1 Gennaio 1934, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ Giorgio Pasquali, *Traduzioni, classici e antichi in Filologia e Storia* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1998), p. 35.

³⁶ Giorgio Pasquali, *Arti e studi in Italia nell’ultimo venticinquennio*. Gli studi di greco, “Leonardo”, I, 1925, 12, pp. 261-265 now in *Scritti filologici, II, Letteratura latina Cultura Contemporanea Recensioni* a cura di F. Bornmann, G. Pascucci, S. Timpanaro, introduzione di A. La Penna, Firenze, Olschki, 1986, pp. 736-751. Pasquali’s polemics on the role of translation is informed by his belief that translation cannot be considered a satisfactory form of exegesis. On Pasquali’s translations see A. Ronconi, *Il filologo in Per Giorgio Pasquali. Studi e testimonianze*, ed. by L. Caretti, (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1972), pp. 116-117. On the position of the rest of the classical philologists see Fausto Giordano’s introduction to the volume Giorgio Pasquali, *Filologia e storia* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1998), pp. III-XXI. In his introduction, Giordano quotes, together with Romagnoli and Fraccaroli, the other classical philologists who believed in the importance of the ‘*traduzioni estetizzanti*’ such as Domenico Comparetti, Girolamo Vitelli, Ermenegildo Pistelli and Nicola Festa (the founders of the “Società Italiana per la diffusione degli studi classici” and of the journal “Atene e Roma”).

Starting from the translations of Romagnoli and Giuseppe Fraccaroli,³⁷ Pasquali bemoans the fact that the widespread practice of translations happened more as an imitation of those two professors (*esempio*) rather than an actual outcome of what they actually taught (*insegnamento*).³⁸ In a word, Romagnoli and Fraccaroli were still acceptable. Their followers were not.³⁹

Combining Croce's and Gentile's views, Manara Valgimigli, another influential classical scholar, discussed at length the scope of poetic translation with special reference to Greek tragedy. In his *Del tradurre la poesia antica* (1952), Valgimigli challenged the idea of the translator as the best commentator. In opposition to this, he claimed the irreducible otherness of every translation by comparison to the original, and ultimately denied that translation was at all possible:

Perché non siamo noi che, ritornando indietro, dobbiamo andare da Eschilo, è Eschilo che viene fino a noi. Il nostro Eschilo non è il povero mortale e corporale Eschilo che poetò in Atene e morì e fu sepolto a Gela nel 476. Il nostro Eschilo è quello che si è gettato, che si è immerso nel fiume dei secoli che a noi lo riportano e lo ricongiungono.⁴⁰

In light of such impossibility, Valgimigli therefore considered groundless any effort to create equivalences between Greek metrics and the phonic structure of the Italian language, and opted for plain prose as the only viable kind of rendition.⁴¹ Almost in

³⁷ Pasquali here quotes Giuseppe Fraccaroli and Ettore Romagnoli as the two emblematic cases, probably the most famous ones, of classical scholars who devoted particular attention to the practice of translation from the Classics.

³⁸ In addition to this, Pasquali saw a substantial difference between a "classical text" and an "ancient text". According to Pasquali, only classical texts deserve to be translated and therefore made accessible to everyone, whereas the ancient texts must remain object of the specialists' attention. These positions are discussed in the chapters "Traduzioni, classici e antichi" (pp. 31-38), in "Classici e antichi, traduzioni e commenti" (pp. 39-43), "Classici, antichi e studio storico" (pp. 44-49) in *Filologia e storia*. Giordano discussed the importance of such a difference in shaping a view of the Greek and Latin cultures not as a normative model to be imitated (*umanesimo*), but as a stratified civilization in need of a set of specific skills and learned approaches. Giordano agrees with Sebastiano Timpanaro, who in his review of the second edition of *Filologia e Storia*, credited Pasquali with the merit of having discarded the *umanesimo* root - present in Wilamowitz's conception of classical philology- from his own philological approach, in «Crit. Stor.», 4, 1965, p. 565.

³⁹ On Pasquali's pedagogic interest see Giorgio Pasquali, *Università e scuola* (Florence: Sansoni, 1950).

⁴⁰ Manara Valgimigli, *Del tradurre poesia antica in Del tradurre e altri scritti* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1957), p. 20.

⁴¹ Manara Valgimigli, *Eschilo. Le Coefore* (Bari: Laterza, 1948), pp. 7-8.

contradiction with his theories, Valgimigli nonetheless translated several tragedies both for educational publications and for theatrical representations, reducing and adapting the text in various ways. Among the many translations he undertook, his Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* for the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza in 1946 must be remembered for its resonance. With this play, Valgimigli revived a centuries-old tradition of the Olympic Theatre that hosted *Oedipus Rex* in 1585.⁴² Moreover, Valgimigli collaborated with INDA by translating Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*.⁴³

Gennaro Perrotta's scholarship can be considered another example demonstrating the merging of historical philology with the positions of Italian Idealism. In his famous *Storia della letteratura greca*, and more precisely in a letter addressed to Croce, Perrotta openly declared his intellectual debt to Croce's aesthetic:

Ho tentato di applicare allo studio della letteratura greca le vostre teorie sull'arte, delle quali sono da vent'anni convinto seguace.⁴⁴

The influence of Perrotta's *Storia della letteratura greca*, which applied literary criticism to classical philology, was remarkable, as the many editions of the book demonstrate. The *Storia* is often remembered as an incredibly successful pedagogical tool which guided generations of students in learning Greek literature.⁴⁵ Perrotta's firm belief in historical philology – it is worth remembering that he had been Pasquali's pupil – is particularly evident in his studies of Greek tragedy. In his seminal volume *I tragici greci* (1931), Perrotta aimed at offering an interpretation of Greek tragedy free from any vestiges of classicism or

⁴² On this Jean Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Oedipus in Vicenza and in Paris: Two Turning Points in the History of Oedipus in Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, translated by Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 361 (pp. 361-380).

⁴³ Manara Valgimigli, *La Oresteia: Agamennone, Coefore, Eumenidi. Eschilo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1948).

⁴⁴ I quote from Marcello Gigante, *Gennaro Perrotta e Benedetto Croce* in *Giornate di studio su Gennaro Perrotta*, eds. Bruno Gentili; Agostino Masaracchia (Pisa-Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1996), pp. 129-152, (p. 146).

⁴⁵ Aurelio Privitera, *La storia della letteratura greca di Gennaro Perrotta* in *Giornate di studio su Gennaro Perrotta*, pp. 21-39.

romanticism, grounding his analysis on the historical and philological method.⁴⁶ Perrotta considered translation only a minor aspect of a wider analysis of the text comprising the following stages: “esame della tradizione e dell’apparato critico, analisi linguistica e metrica, traduzione, interpretazione storica ed estetica”.⁴⁷ Somewhat contradictory, Perrotta is now often remembered for the modernity of his approach to translation.⁴⁸ His translations of Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis* (1931) and of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (1953) are, perhaps, his most famous versions. Interestingly, in his preface to the *Women of Trachis* Perrotta declared that he had attempted to produce an anti-classicist translation, thus connecting his translation to the same agenda that informs his study on Greek tragedy. Unlike Romagnoli, Perrotta rejected the use of the hendecasyllable for his translation of Greek tragedy, paying attention mostly to the performativity of the text. Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, translated for the stage of Syracuse, is considered the translation where his attention to performativity comes to the fore most evidently.

This overview has shown that the reception of Greek tragedy in 20th-century Italy knew a significant season mostly thanks to the work of two figures, against the background of a great deal of discussion on translation. Although the poet D’Annunzio warmly encouraged the ‘rebirth of tragedy’, it was thanks the classical philologist Romagnoli that Greek tragedy began to be performed on a regular basis in ancient theatres and was indeed reborn. Romagnoli’s relentless commitment to translation and theatrical representations of Greek tragedy prompted an increasing number of translations as well as opening a critical debate on the scope and aims of poetic translation. With the exception of Pasquali, the rest of the classicists, in more or less subtle contrast with Romagnoli’s ideology, practically contributed to the rebirth of Greek tragedy by offering their expertise and their

⁴⁶ Masaracchia, *Gli scritti sulla tragedia greca* in *Giornate di studio su Gennaro Perrotta*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁷ Giuliana Cardinali, *Ricordo di Gennaro Perrotta* in *Giornate di studio su Gennaro Perrotta*, p. 118.

⁴⁸ Masaracchia, *Gli scritti sulla tragedia greca*, p. 89: “Uno degli aspetti più nuovi e moderni dell’opera di Perrotta è la sua opera di traduttore.”

translations for INDA's festivals. However, the theoretical scope of this rebirth, entirely based on translations, appears largely underdeveloped.⁴⁹ The restraint exercised by Croce's and Gentile's theories of "relative translatability" surely did not encourage the theoretical debate on the scope of literary translation. Similarly, classical scholars never considered translation more than a minor practice useful only within the much wider and articulated analysis of classical literature.

2.0 Birth and rebirth of tragedy: the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy and its cultural relations with the European Classical scholarship

The changes within the European intellectual community, with specific reference to classical scholarship, in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries profoundly influenced Italian culture. The 20th century saw the blooming of a new whole set of critical perspectives, which questioned the Hermeneutics of the Classics and fostered new interpretative methodologies. The intellectual upheaval began in the second half of the Eighteenth century Germany, when classicists and philosophers interrogated the modes of enquiry of historical philology, thus expressing the need for a more comprehensive, and less compartmental, approach to the study of classical civilization. This was the beginning of the creation of the paradigm known as *Altertumswissenschaft*⁵⁰. Such interrogations culminated in the formation of what we now define as two critical perspectives: the anthropological and comparative method and Hellenocentrism.

⁴⁹ Zoboli, *La riflessione dei traduttori (1900-1920)* and *La riflessione dei traduttori (1921-1960)* in *La rinascita della tragedia*, pp. 80-84 and pp. 120-124, highlighted the lack of a theoretical debate on translation also among the translators themselves, who mostly appeared to be concerned with the formal issue of choosing between verse and prose.

⁵⁰ On the history of classical scholarship in Eighteenth century Germany and on the creation of the paradigm known as *Altertumswissenschaft* see Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), especially part 2 *On the Contours of Das Altertum and the Possibility of its Recovery: Heyne versus Wolf*, chapter 6 (*Heyne, Winckelmann, and Altertumswissenschaft*), pp. 162- 191.

Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729 – 1812)⁵¹ - a figure who has recently received increasing scholarly interest – is considered the founder of the comparative and anthropological school.⁵² Heyne addressed the study of classical civilization by comparing the ancient Greek culture with eastern primitive civilizations. The combination of archeology, philology and history of religion led him to ask classical antiquity one of the paramount questions of modern anthropology, that is to say the primary causes at the origin of the differentiation process in ancient civilizations.⁵³

The ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), who was one of Heyne's students at Göttingen University, are at the heart of the other main school of thought that developed in those years, the Hellenocentric approach. Humboldt established a paradigm according to which the Greeks were divine and not comparable to other ancient civilizations. Such a perspective generated the necessity of creating specific interpretative categories for Greek civilization:

For us the Greeks step out of the circle of history. [...] We fail entirely to recognize our relationship to them if we dare to apply the standards to them which we apply to the rest of world history. Knowledge of the Greeks is not merely pleasant, useful or necessary to us – no, in the Greeks alone we find the ideal of that which we should like to be and produce. If every part of history enriched us with its human wisdom and human experience, then from the Greeks we take something more than earthly – almost godlike.⁵⁴

Such an axiom spreads almost like a sacred formula throughout the 20th-century: the 'superiority' of the Greeks exerted an enormous influence both on scholarly approaches and, more generally, on the larger public. It is worth remembering that Humboldt's ideas also played a paramount role in the way in which education was conceived and organized in

⁵¹ Sostera Fornaro, *Christian Gottlob Heyne dans l'histoire des études classiques* in *Revue germanique internationale*, 14, 2011, pp. 15-26.

⁵² On the figure of C.G. Heyne see Ulrich Schindel, *C.G. Heyne* in Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III, *Classical Scholarship. A biographical Encyclopedia* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 176-182.

⁵³ Sostera Fornaro, p. 5, compares Heyne's questions to those posed by Lévy-Strauss: "Heyne se demande [...] pour parler comme Lévy-Strauss, pourquoi il existe des différences entre les cultures malgré l'uniformité de l'esprit humain."

⁵⁴ From M. Cowan, *An anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt: Humanist Without Portfolio* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p.79.

Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Humboldt's theories⁵⁵, which inspired the *ratio studiorum* in the Prussian school reform of 1809-1810, extended their influence also to the Italian scene. The most evident aspect was the introduction into the school system, in 1861, of the study of ancient Greek language.⁵⁶ The principle inspiring Humboldt's reforms held Greek thought as the origin of logos from which philosophy and tragedy originated. It was therefore essential for modern society to look to the political, social and intellectual structure of the Greeks and to imitate their excellent model.⁵⁷

Together with Heyne and Humboldt it is worth quoting, also for chronological proximity and for its resonance, the contribution from another classical philologist, James George Frazer (1854-1941). In his *Golden Bough* (1890), the Greeks remain 'special' among ancient civilizations for having exceptionally experienced the three evolutionary steps: magic, religion and democracy. Frazer applied the anthropological category of the conglomerate - a concept borrowed from geology - according to which preexisting beliefs, instead of being substituted by the new ones, cluster together thus continuing to exist within the same historical period.⁵⁸ As Bertelli pointed out⁵⁹, Frazer did not hesitate to institute - which is characteristic of his method - a comparison between Plato's philosophy and animistic thought:

⁵⁵ On Humboldt's reforms see *Humboldt's Education Reforms* in Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*, vol. I, (London: Free Association Books, 1987), pp. 285-288.

⁵⁶ F. Boiardi, *La riforma della scuola di Gabrio Casati in Il parlamento italiano* (Milan: Nuova CEI Informatica, 1988), pp. 317-318.

⁵⁷ Humboldt's Hellenocentrism exerted a significant influence on classical scholarship. Werner Jaeger's monumental *Paideia* is, perhaps, the most famous example of the Hellenocentric principle and of its pedagogical application. On the influence exerted by Jaeger's thought see W.M. Calder III, *Werner Jaeger and Richard Harder: an Erklärung*, QS, 9, 1983, pp. 19 ss. W.M. Calder III, Werner Jager in *Classical Scholarship. A Biographical Encyclopedia*, New York-London 1990, pp. 219 ss.; W.M. Calder III ed., *Werner Jager Reconsidered*, «Illinois Classical Studies», Supplement 3, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); C. Franco, *Werner Jager in Italia: il contributo di Piero Treves*, QS, 3, 1997, p. 51, ss. Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo*, pp. 218 ss. Jas Elsner, *Paideia: Ancient concept and Modern Reception in International Journal of Classical Tradition*, 20, 2013, pp. 136-152.

⁵⁸ I here refer to the anthropological notion of conglomerate introduced by E. R. Dodds in *Plato, the Irrational Soul, and the Inherited Conglomerate* in *The Greeks And The Irrational* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 207-235.

⁵⁹ Lucio Bertelli, *J.E. Harrison e «Ritualisti di Cambridge»: la riscoperta del «primitivo» in Ítaca. Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica*, 21, 2005, p. 118.

Now it is quite true that every voluntary action of every man is directed to some good or rather to something that seems to him good. But acting thus for a good implies a mind in which there is a picture of an object to be attained. But from the fact that all our vocabulary actions are prompted by this mental preconception of an object, were we to infer that every change in physical things is prompted by a striving after the good, we would be committing the same mistake into which savages fall when, from the analogy of their own acts, they ascribe the action of inanimate objects to a principle of life, thought, and feeling inherent in these objects.⁶⁰

Humboldt's Hellenocentric approach and Heyne's and Frazer's comparative-anthropological method continued to evolve throughout the 20th century. It is fascinating to track the evolution of these critical perspectives and the impact they had in Europe, including the Italian scene. Frazer's pivotal lesson on the origins of Greek religion and study of myth inspired the so-called circle of "Cambridge Ritualists".⁶¹ The works of Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) and Francis Macdonald Cornford (1874-1943) were profoundly indebted to Frazer's innovative perspective. Harrison's field was Greek religion and its connections with other early religions.⁶² Murray applied the anthropological approach to his study of the primitive, explaining its evolution towards the creation of the logos.⁶³ Cornford mostly delved into Greek historiography, investigating its mythical-religious implications.⁶⁴ However different from one another, the 'Ritualists' shared the desire to discover the origins of Greek culture by using an interdisciplinary approach that included anthropology, archeology, philology and philosophy.⁶⁵ In particular, Cornford's approach was influential over the second generation of French

⁶⁰ Robert Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer, His life and work* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990³), p. 26.

⁶¹ On this see Ackerman, *The myth and Ritual School. J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). See also *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered. Proceedings of the First Oldfather Conference, Held on the Campus of the Univeristy of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign April 27-30 1989* ed. by William M. Calder III in *Illinois Classical Studies, Supplement 2* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

⁶² On Jane Harrison see Lucio Bertelli, *J.E. Harrison e «Ritualisti di Cambridge»: la riscoperta del «primitivo»*, pp. 111-138. See also Renate Schleisier, Jane Ellen Harrison in Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III, *Classical Scholarship. A biographical Encyclopedia* (New York&London: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 127-141.

⁶³ On Gilbert Murray see Robert Fowler, *Gilbert Murray* in Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III, *Classical Scholarship. A biographical Encyclopedia* (New York&London: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 321-334.

⁶⁴ On F. M. Cornford see Douglas Kellog Wood, F. M. Cornford in Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III, *Classical Scholarship. A biographical Encyclopedia* (New York&London: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 23-36.

⁶⁵ Bertelli, *J.E. Harrison e «Ritualisti di Cambridge»: la riscoperta del «primitivo»*, pp. 120-121.

historical anthropologists. Among these, Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914-2007) and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1930-2006) gained great reputations especially through their researches on Greek tragedy.⁶⁶ Vernant and Naquet identified ‘ambiguous speech’ as the distinctive feature of tragedy. In so doing, these scholars highlighted the polysemous, and therefore poetic, nature of the tragic text assigning to modern poets the task of reactivating that multiplicity of levels inherent in the tragic word.⁶⁷

The breadth of this set of methodological approaches – which I here could only briefly present – clearly testifies to the relevance of Greeks’ thought and culture to modernity, whether we assert the superiority of the Greeks or we compare their civilisation with other civilisations of the ancient world.

Classical reception in Italy in the first half of the 20th century and, in particular, the figures who dealt with Greek tragedy, owe to the Germans their interpretative models. Italian classicists remained firmly attached to the modes of enquiry of historical philology. Giorgio Pasquali’s philology, which influenced generations of Italian students and academics, was a direct application of the doctrine elaborated by scholars such as Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff.⁶⁸ However, German culture was to play a fundamental role also in terms of aesthetic ideology⁶⁹, as is particularly evident in D’Annunzio’s and Romagnoli’s views on the reception of Greek tragedy. D’Annunzio’s idealized image of Greece and his call for the rebirth of tragedy are imbued with references to Friedrich Nietzsche’s aesthetic theories. The vast echo of Nietzsche’s *The birth of tragedy* (1872) in

⁶⁶ Jean Pierre Vernant; Pierre-Vidal Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, translated by Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

⁶⁷ Vernant; Vidal Naquet, *Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek tragedy in Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, pp. 29-48 and pp. 21-22.

⁶⁸ On Giorgio Pasquali’s relationship with the world of German philology see C.J. Classen, *Giorgio Pasquali, un italiano come mediatore della scienza tedesca*, « QS », 13, 1987, (p.6). The dependence of Pasquali’s philology on Wilamowitz is discussed by B. Bravo, *Giorgio Pasquali e l’eredità del XIX secolo in Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert*, II, M.Bollack-H. Wismann eds., (Göttingen: 1983), pp. 333-358. See also Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia dello spirito tedesco nelle memorie di un contemporaneo* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013).

⁶⁹ On the relationship between the philological approach and the literary criticism inspired by aestheticism in the Italian *Novecento* see G. Vitelli, *Filologia classica... e romantica*, ed. by T. Lodi (Florence: 1962), pp. 133-143.

20th-century European culture found in D'Annunzio a passionate follower, as we have seen in his *Rinascenza della tragedia*. Similarly, Romagnoli's keen interest in the music of the Greeks and the vital connection between music and tragedy cannot be fully appreciated without Nietzsche's lesson. The project of launching Greek tragedy as a modern performance through the foundation of INDA in the Greek theatre of Syracuse is reminiscent of Nietzsche's invitation to restore the unity of the arts (music, dance and poetry) which was a feature of Greek tragedy.⁷⁰ When considering the opposition between the comparative anthropological method and the Hellenocentric model, we must conclude that the reception of Greek tragedy in Italy is entirely skewed towards the latter. Italy had to wait until the 1970s to witness the employment of the comparative and anthropological approaches to the study of classical civilization.

At this point, I should not fail to mention yet another critical approach that proved essential to the development of the discourse on tragedy: German idealism.⁷¹ This philosophy added further complexity to the study of Greek tragedy and that of the concept of tragic.⁷² The concept of tragic transcends the historicity of the genre. As a result, fragments of the genre, either thematic or stylistic, were often dislocated outside the boundary of its genre. Greek tragedy became a conceptual category which could be dislocated outside its historical reality and placed within other genres and fields of enquiry. Peter Szondi's seminal *An essay on the Tragic* (1961) showed how, since Schelling, 'there has been a philosophy of the tragic'.⁷³ Greek tragedy and its reception metamorphosed into

⁷⁰ Romagnoli's aesthetic theories are discussed in his *Minerva e lo scimmione* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1917) and in *Lo scimmione in Italia* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919).

⁷¹ On this topic see J. Taminiaux, *Le théâtre des philosophes. La tragédie, l'être, l'action*, (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1995); D. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks. Tragedy and Ethical Life*, (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001); Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); M. Thibodeau, *Hegel et la tragédie grecque*, (Rennes: Rennes University Press, 2011); Joshua Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy*, (Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 2014).

⁷² A concise overview of the vast debate on the concept of tragic is offered by Carlo Gentili; Gianluca Garelli, *Il tragico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).

⁷³ Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, p. 1.

a reflection on the tragic as a philosophical concept often detached from its literary genre as well as from the poetics of tragedy expressed by Aristotle.⁷⁴ Tragic poetry as a historical genre has been replaced by philosophical definitions of tragic – a notion which has touched nearly all literary genres, allowing for contaminations and mutations of various kinds.⁷⁵ The proliferation of critical perspectives prompted by the concept of tragic mirrors indeed the breadth of the concept itself.⁷⁶ 20th-century Italian literature was remarkably open to the concept of tragic. This is particularly evident in the narrative and fictional genres, as Barberi Squarotti's study demonstrated.⁷⁷ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the depths of such a vast interdisciplinary area.⁷⁸

2.1 Italian poets and Greek tragedy: the connection with INDA and the innovative nature of Camillo Sbarbaro's and Giovanna Bemporad's translations

Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations are a far cry both from the philosophical speculation on the tragic and from the newly born ideologies and enquiries of classical scholarship. Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's dialogue with Greek tragedy originated from a direct study of ancient tragic texts and a poetic involvement with them. As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, the majority of translations of Greek tragedies were commissioned for the stage. Until the end of the 1950s, INDA festivals staged Greek tragedies as translated by classical scholars. To name a few, Gennaro Perrotta with *Prometheus Bound* (1954) and Leone Traverso with *Hippolytus* (1956). Zoboli considers Pier

⁷⁴ Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ According to Szondi the philosophy of the tragic begins with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling.

⁷⁶ The bibliography on this topic is vast. Recently, Cristina Savettieri devoted critical attention to this matter, also discussing the Italian situation, in her article *Tragedia, tragico e romanzo nel modernismo* in *Allegoria*, XXIII, 2011, pp. 45-63. The article offers a useful discussion of the *status quo* of criticism on the tragic and the tragedy.

⁷⁷ Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti, *Le sorti del «tragico». Il Novecento italiano: romanzo e teatro* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1978). In his analysis, Squarotti aligns with George Steiner's argument in his *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber&Faber, 1995).

⁷⁸ For a concise overview of the overlap between the reception of the tragic and the reception of Greek tragedy see Andrea Rodighiero, *La tragedia greca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 7-10.

Paolo Pasolini's translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a turning point.⁷⁹ The translation was commissioned by Vittorio Gassman and Luciano Lucignani, and was staged in 1960 in Syracuse prompting a new phase in INDA: poets and theatre directors are now going to replace classicists.

Pasolini's interest in Greek literature dates back to his formative years and his first literary experiences. A rewriting of the myth of Oedipus, *Edipo all'alba* (1942)⁸⁰ and translations of Sappho's fragments into Italian and Friulian (1945-1947)⁸¹ are the most evident examples of his passion for Greek literature. The "Friulian" years are also the ones characterized by his friendship with Giovanna Bemporad, who joined Pasolini's didactic experiment as a teacher of Greek and Latin in 1942, and by his didactic commitment.⁸² In his *Quaderno di un insegnante* (1948), Pasolini annotated the importance of translation from the Classical languages: "La traduzione, in qualsiasi aspetto, è l'operazione più vitale dell'uomo".⁸³ Pasolini charged with meaning the act of translation. Pasolini's work for INDA should be considered in light of such a statement.⁸⁴ When Pasolini began to translate Aeschylus, he was already undertaking a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Soon after, precisely at the end of 1960, Pasolini also began to translate Sophocles' *Antigone*.⁸⁵

In his *Lettera del traduttore*, a foreword to his translation of Aeschylus' trilogy, Pasolini outlined his poetics of translation as follows:

Come tradurre? Io possedevo già un "italiano" ed era naturalmente quello delle *Ceneri di Gramsci* [...] sapevo (per istinto) che avrei potuto farne uso. [...] La tendenza linguistica generale è stata a modificare continuamente i toni sublimi in toni civili: una disperata

⁷⁹ Zoboli, *Rinascita della tragedia*, p. 131.

⁸⁰ On Pasolini's rewriting of the Oedipus' myth see Giacomo Trevisan, *Edipo all'alba «Io griderò chiara e intatta la mia vergogna»*. Studio su "Edipo all'alba" di Pier Paolo Pasolini, in «Studi Pasoliniani», n. 2, Pisa – Roma, 2008, pp. 37-55.

⁸¹ The fragments are now in Massimo Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini. Mito e cinema* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996), pp. 243-246.

⁸² I discuss Pasolini's school and Bemporad's experience as a teacher in chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁸³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Dal diario di un insegnante*, p. 1336.

⁸⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Dal diario di un insegnante*, p. 1336.

⁸⁵ Now in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teatro* ed. by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), pp. 1013-124.

correzione di ogni tentazione classicista. Da ciò un avvicinamento alla prosa, alla locuzione bassa, ragionante. Il greco di Eschilo non mi pare una lingua né eletta né espressiva: è estremamente strumentale. Talvolta fino a una magrezza elementare e rigida: a una sintassi priva degli aloni e degli echi che il classicismo romantico ci ha abituati a percepire, quale continua allusività del testo classico a una classicità paradigmatica, storicamente astratta.⁸⁶

According to Pasolini, Aeschylus' civil language reflects the themes of the trilogy, which have exclusively political significance.⁸⁷ Aeschylus' characters are understood as symbols: they express ideas on stage or, to use a term dear to Pasolini, an ideology. Yet, it is the foundation of democracy and the establishment of the suffrage that were to capture the poet's attention, thus stressing even more the socio-political approach informing his analysis and, therefore, his translation:

Il momento più alto della trilogia è sicuramente l'acme delle Eumenidi, quando Atena istituisce la prima assemblea democratica della storia. Nessuna vicenda, nessuna morte, nessuna angoscia delle tragedie dà una commozione più profonda e assoluta di questa pagina. La trama delle tre tragedie di Eschilo è questa: in una società primitiva dominano dei sentimenti che sono primordiali, istintivi, oscuri (le Erinni), sempre pronte a travolgere le rozze istituzioni (la monarchia di Agamennone) [...] L'incertezza esistenziale della società primitiva permane come categoria dell'angoscia esistenziale o della fantasia nella società evoluta.⁸⁸

Pasolini's focus on the transhistorical nature of tragedy, to use the terminology of Vernant-Naquet, is evident from this excerpt.⁸⁹ Pasolini makes a silent comparison between the institution of the first democratic assembly in Athens and the creation of the Italian republic, fresh from civil war atrocities and having recently achieved universal suffrage. By insisting on the anthropological meaning of the Furies, Pasolini again alludes to the transhistorical level of the tragic conscience: from dark and primitive forces, the irrational aspects are transformed into the modern category of existential angst.

⁸⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettera del traduttore* now in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teatro*, p. 1007.

⁸⁷ On Pasolini's translation of Aeschylus see Luigi Enrico Rossi, *L'approccio non classicistico di Pasolini alla tragedia attica* in Tullio De Mauro; Francesco Ferri eds., *Lezioni su Pasolini* (Ripatransone: Edizioni Sestante, 1997), pp. 123-131.

⁸⁸ Pasolini, *Lettera del traduttore*, p. 1008.

⁸⁹ On the category of Transhistoricity see Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal Naquet, *The Tragic Subject: Historicity and Transhistoricity in Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, pp. 237-248.

Pasolini's translation of Aeschylus' tragedy prompted a new phase in the poet's creative work.⁹⁰ A great deal of work for the theatre followed, including the *Manifesto del nuovo teatro*. His subsequent filmography drew extensively on Greek tragic material.⁹¹ Pasolini's *Oresteia* also had a great impact on the media. Thanks to his exceptional communication skills, Pasolini drew new attention to the reception of Greek tragedy.⁹²

Salvatore Quasimodo's translations of Greek tragedies, also completed for Syracuse, did not exert the same influence nor did it have a similar impact.⁹³ Quasimodo was involved with INDA at first as a theatre critic.⁹⁴ He translated Greek tragedy only later, between the 1940s and 1960s. Quasimodo took great pains to make the tragic text as intelligible as possible.⁹⁵ One must consider Quasimodo's incessant polemic with the classicists' translations, which he faulted as being hyper-literary.⁹⁶ His constant dialogue with theatre

⁹⁰ Stefano Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini* (Milan: Ubilibri, 20015), pp. 93: "Dopo la traduzione per Gassman, il teatro è diventato per Pasolini una precisa realtà e non più solo metafora di grandezza o proiezione della tragedia personale, e le tracce rimaste nei suoi scritti marcano questo cambiamento."

⁹¹ Between 1965 and 1966 Pasolini wrote six tragedies: *Orgia*, *Affabulazione*, *Pilade*, *Bestia da stile*, *Porcile*, *Calderón*. Among those, Casi focuses on the connections of these tragedies with Pasolini's translation of Greek tragedy: "[...] due opere, concepite in stretta connessione con la tragedia classica: *Pilade*, ideale continuazione dell'*Orestide*, e *Affabulazione*, che reinterpreta le sofoclee *Trachinie* ed *Edipo re*. Intanto si perdono per strada altre ipotesi come quella di un "poema drammatico" dal titolo *Malcom X* e della tragedia *Teorema*, che dopo la scrittura dei primi monologhi muta percorso trasformandosi in ipotesi di sceneggiatura, così come la rilettura di *Edipo re* di Sofocle lo convince a progettare un film su questa storia.", p. 142. In addition to this, Pasolini wrote *Manifesto per un nuovo teatro*. On the 'cultural ritual' that the *Manifesto* was supposed to create, see David War's introduction to his English translation of the *Manifesto* in *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Contemporary perspectives*, eds. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 152-154. The interest in Greek mythology and Greek tragedy has been traced as one of the "costanti tematiche" in Pasolini. On this see Massimo Fusillo, *La Grecia secondo Pasolini*, p. 6

⁹² On the impact that Pasolini's translation had see Federico Condello, *Su Pasolini traduttore classico. Sparsi rilievi tra fatti e leggende* in «Semicerchio» XLVII/2, 2012, pp. 8-17.

⁹³ Quasimodo translated the following tragedies: Sophocles' *Oedipus rex* (Milan: Bompiani, 1946); Sophocles' *Electra* (Milan: Mondadori, 1954); Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* (Milan: Bompiani, 1949); Euripides' *Hecuba* (Urbino: Argalia, 1962); Euripides' *Herakles* (Urbino, Argalia; 1966). Some tragedies are now collected in *Tragici greci tradotti da Salvatore Quasimodo. Le coefore di Eschilo, Elettra di Sofocle, Edipo re di Sofocle* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963).

On Salvatore Quasimodo's translations of Greek tragedy see Danilo Ruocco, *Salvatore Quasimodo e il teatro in Quasimodo* ed. by Alessandro Quasimodo (Milano: Mazzotta, 1999), pp. 169-181. A list of all the tragedies translated by Quasimodo is included in *Quasimodo* ed. by Alessandro Quasimodo, pp. 195-198.

⁹⁴ Quasimodo's reviews are now collected in Alessandro Quasimodo ed., *Salvatore Quasimodo. Il poeta a teatro* (Milan: Spirali Edizioni, 1984).

⁹⁵ Ruocco, *Salvatore Quasimodo e il teatro*, p. 172.

⁹⁶ Ruocco, *Salvatore Quasimodo e il teatro*, p. 171.

directors, the attention to their poetics and the use of everyday language were aimed at mastering a translation of Greek tragedy that everyone could access.⁹⁷

A substantially different approach to the translation of Greek tragedy is that of Edoardo Sanguineti, another poet who translated for INDA and other Italian theatres.⁹⁸ Among the poets considered so far, Sanguineti is the one who most enthusiastically charged his translation with an ideological apparatus. According to Sanguineti, the historicity of language is responsible for the gap between historical ages.⁹⁹ Having thus acknowledged the unbridgeable division between languages of different periods, Sanguineti theorized translation as an accurate calque of the original. The calque allowed the closest proximity to the text and, at the same time, the greatest distance from it.¹⁰⁰ Sanguineti's idea of the calque for the translation of Greek tragedy interestingly recalls Vernant-Naquet's reflections on the role of Dionysus, as the protector god of the tragic genre, and on the function of his presence-absence.¹⁰¹ The theory of the calque led to an extremely literal translation which challenged the formal elocution and the actors' dramatic skills. Such an alienating approach to translation served the purpose of increasing awareness of the historicity of language, which was further enhanced by the translator's own voice and Cartesian quote *larvatus prodeo*.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Ruocco, *Salvatore Quasimodo e il teatro*, p. 171.

⁹⁸ Sanguineti's translations of Greek tragedy are now published in Edoardo Sanguineti, *Teatro antico. Traduzioni e ricordi*, ed. by F. Condello and C. Longhi (Milan: BUR, 2006). On Sanguineti's translations see Paola Bisulca, *Il traduttore-attore: Edoardo Sanguineti dietro la maschera degli antichi* in «Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico» in <http://www.indafondazione.org/it/il-traduttore-attore-edoardo-sanguineti-dietro-la-maschera-degli-antichi/>.

⁹⁹ On Sanguineti's *storicismo assoluto* and the consequence such a position had on his translation activity see Bisulca, *Il traduttore-attore: Edoardo Sanguineti dietro la maschera degli antichi*.

¹⁰⁰ Bisulca, *Il traduttore-attore: Edoardo Sanguineti dietro la maschera degli antichi*.

¹⁰¹ Vernant-Vidal Naquet, *The God of Tragic Fiction in Myth and Tragedy*, pp. 181-188.

¹⁰² Edoardo Sanguineti, *Introduzione* in Sanguineti, *Teatro antico. Traduzioni e ricordi*, ed. by F. Condello and C. Longhi (Milan: BUR, 2006), pp. 19-20. Edoardo Sanguineti, *Introduzione* in Sanguineti, *Teatro antico. Traduzioni e ricordi*, ed. by F. Condello and C. Longhi (Milan: BUR, 2006), pp. 19-20. On the risks caused by an alienating approach produced by the use of calque and interlinear translation see the seminal essay of Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator* in *Illuminations* ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999).

Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's neglect of all theatrical dimension distances their translations from that of all other poets. Their interaction with Greek tragedy considered solely the textual dimension. Their rejection of performativity is no lack of critical awareness. Unlike classicists, Sbarbaro and Bemporad did not approach Greek tragedy as a surviving piece of art missing its historical and aesthetic context. Instead, they focused on the tragic text as the only relevant objective. In *L'hésitation d'Hamlet et la décision de Shakespeare*, Yves Bonnefoy says:

Tout à l'heure je disais que Shakespeare n'était qu'une parole qui peut être dite sur scène nue, un dire parfaitement suffisant en ses mots et par ses mots. [...] Car une telle parole, c'est tout ce qui est et tout ce qui vit qu'elle a dans le champ de sa réflexion. Si elle n'a que faire d'un rendu scénique encombré des choses du proche, elle se sent concernée, instinctivement, par tout ce qui a lieu dans ce monde, par ses us et façons, par la façon dont les êtres vivent. [...] Shakespeare, pour moi, c'étaient alors tout comme aujourd'hui ces mots qui par eux-même mènent l'action, sans besoin de décor ni même d'acteurs.¹⁰⁴

The intrinsic theatricality of tragedy is self-sufficient. According to Bonnefoy, the staging apparatus is almost an obstacle to the strength of the tragic text. The world itself is its natural stage and audience. Having established the ontological theatricality of the tragic word, he tackles the translator's task. Bonnefoy identifies in the rhythm the only viable dialogue with the tragic text:

le rythme est alors le facteur le plus important dans cette recherche, c'est à cette respiration des mots dans les vers que je subordonne toute formulation de la signification. [...] C'est seulement dans et par la coïncidence avec soi du traducteur par la voie des rythmes que l'horizon du sens se dégage, que les significations les plus importantes se découvrent.¹⁰⁵

Rhythm is the leading route through which the translator can access the core of the tragic text. Moreover, rhythm offers another occasion to reassert the internal theatricality of the tragic word:

¹⁰³ Yves Bonnefoy, *Jouer Hamlet dans le noir* in *L'hésitation d'Hamlet et la décision de Shakespeare* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ Bonnefoy, *Jouer Hamlet dans le noir*, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Bonnefoy, *Jouer Hamlet dans le noir*, p. 121.

Cette attention au vers, c'est aussi un regard sur la mise en scène. Car se recentrer sur le vers met l'accent sur ce qui se joue dans la parole, c'est demander une écoute, c'est préférer la scène nue ou presque nue à tout décor, et surtout c'est refuser à des gestes d'acteurs à l'appui ou en plus du texte.¹⁰⁶

The translation of the tragic text, consequently, can only be framed as a dialogue between the rhythms of two voices. The poet translator, before being able to voice the other, must find his own voice and search for his own rhythm. Sbarbaro and Bemporad's work on Greek tragedy is strongly centered on a rhythmical quest, a vital impulse which subsequently prompted a reflection on their poetics. Although being informed by a similar approach, the two poets' rhythmical quests produced two different outcomes. Bemporad chose the hendecasyllable. As I discuss at length in chapter 3 of this thesis, Bemporad's 'tragic hendecasyllables' are structured in a 'waterfall' model with the effect of expanding the verse beyond syllabic limits. Within this metrical measure, Bemporad found her own rhythm and was able to voice Sophocles' poetry. The vocalic finals and the numerous interjections relentlessly recall the essence of Sophocles's *Electra*, that is to say her continuous lament (ll. 1143-1150):

οἴμοι τάλαινα τῆς ἐμῆς πάλαι τροφῆς
 ἀνωφελήτου, τὴν ἐγὼ θάμ' ἀμφὶ σοὶ
 πόνῳ γλυκεῖ παρέσχον: οὔτε γάρ ποτε
 μητρὸς σύ γ' ἦσθα μᾶλλον ἢ κάμοῦ φίλος,
 οὔθ' οἱ κατ' οἶκον ἦσαν, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τροφός,
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀδελφῆ σοὶ προσηυδώμην αἰεὶ.
 νῦν δ' ἐκλέλοιπε ταῦτ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ
 θανόντι σὺν σοί.

Ahi, la mia antica cura ch'io per te,
 dolce fatica, sopportai! Tua madre
 mai non t'amò quanto t'amavo io!
 Fui io la tua nutrice, e non le donne
 di casa: io che tu sempre mi chiamavi
 sorella: ed ora tutto con te, morto,
 in un giorno soltanto è dileguato.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bonnefoy, *Jouer Hamlet dans le noir*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁷ The interpretative transcription of Bemporad's translation of Sophocles' *Electra* is offered in the appendix.

Sbarbaro sought a rhythmic prose and found its flow in the strict observation of the original *ordo verborum*, without omitting occasional metrical inserts – which recall the hendecasyllables typical of his poetry. Internal correspondences in Sophocles' language (κακῶν / ὄποϊον) are often transformed into assonances or internal rhymes as is evident from the very beginning of his *Antigone* (ll. 1-10):

Ἄντιγόνη
 ὦ κοινὸν ἀυτάδελφον Ἰσμίνης κάρα,
 ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
 ὄποϊον οὐχὶ νῶν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ;
 οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸν οὔτ' ἄτης ἄτερ
 οὔτ' αἰσχροῦ οὔτ' ἄτιμόν ἐσθ', ὄποϊον οὐ
 τῶν σῶν τε κάμῶν οὐκ ὅπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.
 καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ' αὖ φασι πανδήμῳ πόλει
 κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρτίως;
 ἔχεις τι κεισῆκουσας; ἢ σε λανθάνει
 πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;
 (ll. 1-10)

Mia compagna di destino, sorella cara,
 Ismene, del retaggio di Edipo sai un male,
 sai quale, Zeus non avvererà mentre noi
 due siamo ancora in vita? Se né dolore
 né calamità né onta né ignominia vi è
 che già io non abbia vista tra i tuoi ed
 i miei mali.

E adesso che cos'è questo editto che, dico-
 no, ha or ora emanato a tutta la città
 quello che comanda? Sai qualche cosa,
 hai sentito dire? Oppure ignori che i mali
 che si infliggono ai nemici stanno per ab-
 battersi sui nostri cari?¹⁰⁸

Within the corpus of their translations, their translation of Greek tragedians remain unique also for the specific translation methodologies, as we will see.

Bemporad's and Sbarbaro's translations are novel achievements and provide highly interesting instances of the reception of Greek tragedy in the Italian 20th century. Their translations appear detached from ideological perspectives, critical categories of any kind

¹⁰⁸ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Sofocle. Antigone* (Milan: Bompiani, 1943), p. 15.

and theatrical purposes. In so doing, Bemporad and Sbarbaro worked out a different kind of tragic rebirth, based on the inherent theatricality of the tragic word as such.

Chapter 2

Camillo Sbarbaro and the Classics: translating Greek tragedies

Camillo Sbarbaro (1888-1967) was a poet, a teacher of Classics, a translator of Greek, Latin and French, and an expert on lichens.¹ Sbarbaro's relationship with the Classical tradition is deeply rooted in his poetic discourse and intertwined with his lifelong didactic activities. The most substantial output of his interest in Greco-Roman antiquity is to be found in his translations of Greek tragedy. Sbarbaro translated three Greek tragedies during the Second World War: Sophocles' *Antigone* (1943), Aeschylus' *Prometeo incatenato* (1949) and Euripides' *Alceste* (1952). In this chapter, I consider the role of the translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Sbarbaro's poetic opus. The translation of Sophocles is the author's first encounter with Greek tragedy and prompted him to translate Aeschylus' and Euripides' tragedies. Yet there are few detailed studies on this part of Sbarbaro's *oeuvre*.

The translation of the *Antigone* had a multifaceted impact on Sbarbaro's poetic life. The first aspect to consider is the fact that the poet elaborated a wholly peculiar methodology for the translation of Sophocles. Through the analysis of selected passages of Sophocles' *Antigone*, I show how the poet puts into practice this method and I highlight the interpretative framework behind it. A comprehensive analysis of all the three tragedies translated, which for space constraints I could not include in the chapter, allowed me to present the excerpts here offered as representative examples of the poet's substantial work on Greek tragedy in its entirety. Secondly, I argue that translation methodology inspired in Sbarbaro a wider meditation on his own poetics and the metaphorical image of himself as a poet, translator and transcriber, which is fully expressed in his last book *Fuochi fatui*

¹ Eugenio Montale, *Ricordo di Sbarbaro* in *Sulla poesia* ed. by G. Zampa (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), p. 335, highlights Sbarbaro's exceptional command of Greek language: 'Sbarbaro, uomo coltissimo, traduttore formidabile, eccellente grecista, sebbene non avesse perseguito gli studi oltre il liceo, credeva fermamente che la vita fosse più importante della letteratura'.

(1956).² In this regard, the material written during the translations of Greek tragedy, organised by the poet in the subsection titled '1940-1945', details the poet's thoughts on translation and poetics. Thirdly, I discuss the poet's stylistic choice of poetic prose for these translations and I connect it to Sbarbaro's poetic discourse. The poetic prose and the aphoristic nature of *Fuochi fatui* cannot be fully understood without the poet's intense rethinking of his first poetic achievement, *Pianissimo* (1914), which is constantly recalled in the translation of *Antigone*. The differences emerging from the comparison between translation of the Moderns and that of the Ancients help us to understand this connection between *Antigone* and *Pianissimo*. As we will see, when translating the Moderns Sbarbaro pairs the desire to write something new and to divert from the original, encompassing the experience in a playful dimension, but in translating the Ancients the poet embraces both a reverential attitude and a desire to restore the primary quality of the original. This desire of going backwards coincides with a rediscovery of Sbarbaro's own poetic past, the poetic vocation of *Pianissimo*. Through textual analysis, I show how the translation of Sophocles, his sober style and the moral themes investigated by his poetry, guided Sbarbaro in the rethinking of his first poetic experience. This mediation is fundamental to understand the poet's last book *Fuochi fatui*, where the metapoetic meditations intermingle with reflections on translation, and the bare style of *Pianissimo* is sought through the dryness of poetic prose.

Notwithstanding Sbarbaro's rich activity as a translator and the connection between his translation and poetics, scholarly debate on his translations of Greek tragedy is scarce. Gina Lagorio in her monograph *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere* was the first scholar to recognise the impact and the value of these translations by comparing the way in which

² The genesis and the composition of the book is tortuous. Paolo Zoboli in the section *Il terzo libro di Sbarbaro* in Paolo Zoboli, *Linea ligure. Sbarbaro, Montale, Caproni* (Novara: Interlinea, 2006), pp. 251-284, traces the history of the book and of its three editions (1956, 1958, 1962). It is worthwhile noting that the majority of the metapoetic meditations intertwined with the theme of translation are from the section dated 1940-1945, the period in which Sbarbaro translated Greek tragedy.

Sbarbaro made the Modern meet the Ancient through his translations of Greek tragedy which were similar to the pivotal achievement of the *Lirici greci* by Salvatore Quasimodo.³ This insightful, yet too concise, remark was not followed by a display of scholarly interest. The four bibliographies of secondary texts on Sbarbaro edited by Lorenzo Polato (1969, 1974²), Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti (1971), Vanni Scheiwiller (1979) and Gina Lagorio (1981) record very few contributions to the critical discourse on his translations from the Classics as a whole, and the majority focus on his rewriting of Euripides' *Ciclope* (1952).⁴ In the last fifty years, the studies devoting attention to this issue are Gina Lagorio's review of the *Ciclope*,⁵ Anna Maria Mesturini's notes on the *Ciclope*⁶ and the article on *Antigone*,⁷ which first answered the call for attention expressed by Lagorio by drawing critical attention to the translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In her article, Mesturini offered a concise analysis of Sbarbaro's translation of *Antigone* recording the changes and interpolations made by the poet to text. After the description of Sbarbaro's approach to the text, which was guided by linguistic and philological expertise, Mesturini proposed a reading of the translation as influenced by the historical period in which it was made. Based on the Hegelian interpretation of the tragedy as a conflict between private conscience and public laws, Mesturini suggests a reading of this translation as a mirror wherein Sbarbaro sees Italy's historical situation reflected. According to Mesturini, the poet's disagreement with the Fascist regime would then be expressed through the mask of this translation as a means to

³ Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere* (Milan: Garzanti, 1981) devoted insightful paragraphs to these translations within the wider discourse on Sbarbaro's experience of WW2: '[...] fu così che si poté leggere Sofocle, e fece uno stranissimo effetto, come di ritrovata sorgente o addirittura di riscoperta, in un linguaggio del tutto inusitato. [...] In questo senso, l'accostarsi di Sbarbaro ai tragici greci, segnò nell'incontro dei moderni con gli antichi, la stessa svolta che fu di Quasimodo per i lirici', pp. 250-251.

⁴ In chronological order: Lorenzo Polato, *Sbarbaro* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1969, 1974²), pp. 124-129; Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, *Camillo Sbarbaro* (Milan: Mursia, 1971), pp. 244-249; Vanni Scheiwiller, ed., *Camillo Sbarbaro. Poesia e prosa* (Milan: Mondadori, 1979), XXXVI-XLVII; Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, pp. 359-378.

⁵ Gina Lagorio, *Il Ciclope* in «Atene e Roma», n.s. V, (1960), 3, pp. 181-184, now in in Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro controcorrente* (Parma: Guanda, 1973), pp. 255-256.

⁶ Anna Maria Mesturini, *Sbarbaro e il Ciclope di Euripide* in *Resine* [IV], (1975), 47-54.

⁷ Anna Maria Mesturini, *Antigone secondo Sbarbaro* in *Resine* [V], (1976), 3-26.

reflect on themes which were too painful to approach without the filter of literature. Paolo Zoboli's monograph *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*, published in 2005,⁸ followed on from Mesturini's first investigation on the *Antigone*, extending the enquiry to the other two translations of Greek tragedy, *Prometeo incatenato* and *Alcesti*, and to Euripides' satirical drama *Ciclope*. In his book, Zoboli identifies the editions and the commentaries used by Sbarbaro for the four translations aforementioned thus showing Sbarbaro's thorough work on the original texts and reasserting the poet's solid grasp of philology and linguistics highlighted by Mesturini's article. The analysis of the translations, and of their connection with the other Italian versions to which Sbarbaro had access, is a fundamental step towards contextualizing these translations. Zoboli's insightful analysis also demonstrates Sbarbaro's longstanding interest in Classical literature by drawing connections with the poet's life. The major intellectual contribution of the book is to show the difference between the modes of the translations of Greek tragedy and those of the *Ciclope*, which can be defined a proper rewriting, thus suggesting different poetic agendas. According to Zoboli, Sbarbaro did not intend to make autonomous poetry with his translations of Greek tragedy, even if it is recognised that these are translations with many *pregi poetici*.⁹ Zoboli considers the *Ciclope* the translation where one can see Sbarbaro's most evident poetic engagement. The decision to write in verse and Sbarbaro's admission of having transformed the *Ciclope* into a work of his own have been taken as evidence for this.¹⁰

⁸ Paolo Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*, established the reference editions used by Sbarbaro for the tragedies translated. For Aeschylus: Eschyle, tome I: *Les Suppliantes – Les Perses – Les sept contre Thèbes – Prométhée enchaîné*, texte établi et traduit par P. Mazon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1931); Eschilo, *Il Prometeo legato*, con commento di E. Rapisarda (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1936), *Scrittori Greci commentati per le scuole*, 77. For Sophocles: Sophocles, tome I, *Ajax-Antigone-Oedipe roi-Électre*, texte établi et traduit par P. Masqueray (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1929²) and Sofocle, *Antigone*, con note di Placido Cesareo (Torino: Chiantore, 1926 reprint). For Alcestis: Euripide, tome I: *Le Cyclope – Alceste – Médée – Les Héraclides*, texte établi et traduit par L. Méridier (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1926); Euripide, *Alcesti*, commentata da A. Taccone, (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1930), *Scrittori greci commentati per le scuole*, 53. I will follow Mazon's, Masqueray's and Méridier's critical editions when referring to the Greek text.

⁹ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 101.

¹⁰ Sbarbaro openly expresses this idea about the translation of the *Ciclope* in two letters written to Gina Lagorio between March and April 1960 now in Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro controcorrente*, pp. 346-347.

In this study I intend to demonstrate that the difference in terms of poetic engagement and interpretative effort between the *Ciclope* and Greek tragedy suggested by Zoboli is less clear-cut than the critic suggests. The translations of Greek tragedy, as much as that of the *Ciclope*, can be considered as creative works reflecting the author's poetics and responding to a precise aim. The principle of faithfulness, wholly peculiar to these translations, and opposed to the *traduzione liberissima* of the *Ciclope*, to use Sbarbaro's own words, reveals an interpretive effort much deeper than one would expect at first. The choice of poetic prose for these translations should not be considered as evidence of a minor poetic involvement. On the contrary, it is Sbarbaro's most distinctive mark on his interpretation of Greek tragedy.

Zoboli's section on the tragedies and Mesturini's article on *Antigone* remain fundamental studies which first signalled the need for a critical debate on these translations and opened the path to further studies. Their findings highlighted the necessity to reflect on these translations as a means to show the poet's lifelong relationship with the Classics and to appreciate the poet's different agendas behind the texts translated, as in Zoboli's case, or to demonstrate Sbarbaro's use of the text as mask to protest against the political situation mediated by the voice of another author, as Mesturini argues.

The poetic silence during the years of the translations, the so-called *periodo delle frenetiche traduzioni*,¹¹ motivated scholars to read Sbarbaro's translations as imperfect substitutes for his poetic voice. The latter approach obviously rests on the assumption that poetry is superior to translation, allowing the translations to enter the poet's canon only inasmuch as they appear to contain clues about Sbarbaro's own poetic voice.¹² As a result, scholars' interest in the *Ciclope* was driven primarily by its status as a rewriting. The

¹¹ All references are from *Camillo Sbarbaro. L'opera in versi e in prosa* ed. by Gina Lagorio and Vanni Scheiwiller (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), p. 421. From now *OVP*.

¹² For instance, Lorenzo Polato, *Sbarbaro* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1974), pp. 107-110.

history of *Ciclope* editions, the use of the verse, and Sbarbaro's decision to include it in his final corpus (1967)¹³ in the section *Versioni* (together with Pythagoras' *Golden verses* and Pascoli's *Pomponia Grecina* and *Thallusa*) help to explain the difference of interest in terms of critical attention between this rewriting and the other translations of Greek tragedy.

Giuseppe De Robertis, in his review of Sbarbaro's *Fuochi fatui*, a *zibaldone* which was published in 1956 after the long period devoted to translations, highlighted the conceptual line of poetics emerging from this book of fragments. According to De Robertis, the conceptualization of Sbarbaro's poetics has no parallel compared with the other works in terms of poetic awareness. Amongst the variety of themes and forms present in the book, the propositions devoted to poetics are theoretical indications of Sbarbaro's modes of conceiving poetry. These remarks, while discussing the nature of the poetic act, are indeed poetry itself.¹⁴

The proximity of the translations of Greek tragedy to *Fuochi Fatui* is significant: they are chronologically and thematically continuous. *Fuochi fatui*, composed in the period when Sbarbaro was translating Greek tragedy, details his thoughts and meditations on the theme of translation. In the light of De Robertis' remarks, the intersection between Sbarbaro's poetics, reaching its maturity in this book, and his activity as a translator is charged with meaning.

Another important similarity between Sbarbaro's key motifs and the translation of Greek tragedy is to be found on a thematic level. In these translations, in fact, Sbarbaro develops his relentless interest in psychological and moral investigation, a constant feature

¹³ See Vanni Scheiwiller's preface to the final edition of Sbarbaro's *opera omnia*, now reprinted in *OVP*, p. 10.

¹⁴ Giuseppe De Robertis, *Fuochi fatui*, «Gazzetta di Parma», 27th of September 1956 now in *Altro Novecento* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1962), pp. 203-204.

of his work.¹⁵ Starting from the analysis of *Fuochi Fatui*, the scholar Lorenzo Polato identified moral inquiry as a recurring feature in Sbarbaro's research as a poet:

Ora assumendo la figura del saggio, mette a frutto la stessa esperienza dello scavo interiore, dell'autoanalisi che costituiscono la dimensione fondamentale della sua opera, al servizio degli altri, nella forma appunto dell'aforisma. La figura «serena» di questo saggio, per la sua nitida intelligenza e per la sua cordialità, finisce con l'assomigliare a quella di uno stoico antico o di quei classici greci che tanto ha amato, e della cui struttura sintattica vi è più di qualche eco nel suo linguaggio poetico.¹⁶

This passage suggests how Sbarbaro's moral enquiry successfully mingles with the aphoristic nature of *Fuochi fatui*. More importantly, according to Polato, Sbarbaro's passion for Classical literature is traceable also in his syntax. The osmotic process between Sbarbaro being influenced by Greek syntax and actively taking advantage of sentence construction with which he was already familiar (the most obvious example is postposition of the verb) for stylistic reasons, reflects his meditation on and familiarity with Greek literature. His translations of Greek tragedy can shed further light on this aspect.

The poetic prose has to be read as another common trait between Sbarbaro's own poetic work and his translations of Greek tragedy. Sbarbaro's stylistic alternation between poetry and poetic prose is visible in his collections of poems and prose, and it is the heart of a heated scholarly debate discussing Sbarbaro as a poet and as an artist.¹⁷ Sergio Solmi

¹⁵ On the moral dimension of Sbarbaro's poetry: R. Luperini, *Il novecento: apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura contemporanea* (Turin: Loescher, 1981), pp. 223-232, describes Sbarbaro's poetry as guided by a 'moralità del conoscere' which coincides with 'autocoscienza'. S. Ramat, *Storia della poesia del Novecento italiano* (Milan: Mursia, 1976), pp. 73-87, described Sbarbaro's poetic experience as an expression of applied ethics, which shares very little with common morality but strives to elaborate his own moral philosophy. See also Carlo Bo, *Com'era Sbarbaro in Atti del convegno nazionale di studi su Camillo Sbarbaro. Spotorno 6-7 Ottobre 1973*, ed. by A. Guerrini (Genoa: Resine. Quaderni Liguri di cultura, 1974), pp. 7-20.

¹⁶ Polato, *Sbarbaro*, p. 109.

¹⁷ In chronological order: *Resine* (poetry, 1911), *Pianissimo* (poetry, 1914, 1954²), *Trucioli 1914-1918* (prose, 1920), *Liquidazione* (prose, 1928), *Trucioli 1914-1940* (prose, 1948), *Rimanenze* (poetry, 1955, 1956²), *Fuochi fatui* (prose, 1956, 1958², 1962), *Primizie* (poetry, 1958), *Scampoli* (prose, 1960), *Poesie* (poetry, 1961: contain a new redaction of *Pianissimo*, *Primizie* and *Rimanenze*), *Gocce* (prose, 1963), *«Il Nostro» e nuove gocce* (prose, 1964), *Contagocce* (prose, 1965), *Cartoline in franchigia* (prose, 1966), *Bolle di sapone* (prose, 1966), *Vedute di Genova* (prose, 1921), *Quisquilie* (prose). On this aspect see Alfredo Gargiulo, *Camillo Sbarbaro in Letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Florence: LeMonnier, 1943), pp. 171-176, and Stefano Pavarini, *Sbarbaro prosatore. Percorsi ermeneutici dal frammento alla prosa d'arte* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

showed that the oscillation between prose and poetry, together with the decision to rewrite certain texts, flags Sbarbaro's progression in his poetic research.¹⁸ Similarly, Silvio Ramat pinpointed the importance of considering prose and lyrics as complementary aspects of the poet's discourse instead of separating the two categories and fuelling a sterile debate.¹⁹ It would indeed be reductive to catalogue the translations into the 'prose phase' only on the basis of the choice of rhythmic prose to render his translations of Greek tragedy. On the contrary, Sbarbaro is inspired by the metric variety of tragedy, and his stylistic choices aim to reflect this quantitative diversity present in the Greek. Sbarbaro exploits the original oscillation of Greek tragedy between lyrical metres and dramatic sections. He alternates between a lyrical tone recalling his own way of making poetry, without encapsulating it into fixed metrical schemes, and a more prosaic form for the dialogues where we also find hendecasyllables, the verse of *Pianissimo*.²⁰

Sbarbaro's oscillation, throughout his entire literary career, between his prosaic poetry, as Contini defined it,²¹ especially visible in the use of the *endecasillabo libero*²² (many of these are found in the translations of Greek tragedy), and the poetic prose of his fragments is clearly visible in his translations of Greek drama. The translations of Greek tragedy are no coincidence in his work. They mirror his ideas on the relationship between poetry and prose and on their functions as well as offering the author the stylistic

¹⁸ Sergio Solmi, *I «Trucioli» di Sbarbaro* in *Scrittori negli anni* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1963), pp. 232-237.

¹⁹ Silvio Ramat, «*Pianissimo*» di Camillo Sbarbaro in *La poesia italiana 1903-1943. Quarantuno titoli esemplari* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997), pp. 124-135.

²⁰ The presence of verses dispersed throughout the translation of *Antigone* has been noted by Mesturini, *Antigone secondo Sbarbaro*, and then confirmed by Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, who extended the analysis to the translations of *Prometeo Incatenato* and *Alceste*. Unless otherwise stated all quotations from *Pianissimo* are from the first edition (1914), now in *OVP*. However the second edition of *Pianissimo* (1960), also comprised in *OVP*, has also been taken into account when there is the need to appreciate a variant dependent on metaphors inspired by the translations of Greek tragedy.

²¹ On the historical importance of Sbarbaro's prosaic poetry see G. Contini, *Letteratura dell'Italia unita. 1861-1968* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), pp. 726-727.

²² Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Camillo Sbarbaro* in *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), p. 318, associates the use of the *endecasillabo libero* with Sbarbaro's quest for moralism: 'il tormento moralistico si esprime in *Pianissimo* [...] senza alcuna violenza linguistica esibita, semmai con una sorta di violenza silenziosa e soffocata che si affida all'articolazione nudamente prosastica e anti-melodica del verso, principalmente dedotto, come notava già Cecchi, dai più spogli endecasillabi leopardiani.'

possibility of using the two modes within a single piece of work. A few passages from his translations of Greek tragedy actually became part of his *Trucioli dispersi* and *Fuochi Fatui* and *Cartoline in franchigia* thus showing the interchangeability between his translations and his creative work.²³ Key thematic words of Sbarbaro's poetic language appear with considerable frequency throughout his translations thus showing the use of his poetic memory when translating.²⁴ His translations of the *Antigone*, *Prometeo incatenato* and *Alceste* offered the poet the chance to reflect on themes dear to his poetic research filtered by some of the fundamental poetic archetypes of Western literature. Psychological and moral investigation, especially evident in the characters of the tragedy, is fully explored in Sbarbaro's translations. At the same time, he experiments with the balance between prose and poetry within the structure of Greek drama finally achieving the coexistence of two stylistic modes sought throughout his entire career. In addition to this, the methodology elaborated *ad hoc* to translate these texts (the literal translation) intermingled with Sbarbaro's pursuit of an equilibrium between prose and poetry, as well as serving interpretive purposes and offering him inspiration to shape the metaphor he uses for his own poetic identity, the *scrittura sotto dettatura*, a point which I will explain later.

The translations and their numerous editions have an intricate bibliographical timeline, reminiscent of the complicated textual history of Sbarbaro's poetic collections. This history has been studied in a specific section of *Bibliografia degli scritti di Camillo Sbarbaro*, edited by Angeleri and Costa. According to this catalogue, Sophocles' *Antigone* begins the list in 1943 and Jules Amedée Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Due storie diaboliche* ends it in 1977, ten years after Sbarbaro's death.²⁵ The translation of the *Antigone*, was initially begun by Sbarbaro in 1928, but the *periodo delle traduzioni* begins in 1943 with the publication of

²³ As Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, showed at pp. 97-98.

²⁴ Giuseppe Savoca, *Concordanze delle poesie di Camillo Sbarbaro: concordanza, liste di frequenza, indici* (Florence: Olschki, 1989) has been a crucial research tool.

²⁵ Carla Angeleri, Giampiero Costa, eds., *Bibliografia degli scritti di Camillo Sbarbaro* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1986), pp.127-161.

the *Antigone* for Bompiani (2nd edition published in 1945).²⁶ Then, between 1942 and 1945 Sbarbaro translated Aeschylus' *Prometeo incatenato*, Euripides' *Alcesti* and the satirical drama *Ciclope*. However, the *Prometeo incatenato* was only published in 1949 by Bompiani,²⁷ and was then followed by *Alcesti* which was published together with *Ciclope* in 1952 for Bompiani.²⁸ Sbarbaro then further explored the Classics by translating Pythagoras' *Golden verses* (1958, 1960² and 1968³)²⁹ and Giovanni Pascoli's Latin works *Pomponia Grecina* and *Thallusa* (translated by Sbarbaro in 1951-1952, but posthumously published in 1984).³⁰ To this list we should also add his translation of book II of Herodotus' *Histories*, which is referred to in Sbarbaro's correspondence and can be dated to the same period as the *Antigone* translation. In a letter written by E. Vittorini to Sbarbaro, dated Milan, 11th of March 1943 we read:

Caro Sbarbaro, l'Antigone non è ancora pronta perché la tipografia che stampa i Corona rimase danneggiata il 24 Ottobre, e ha dovuto trasferirsi fuori Milano a Trevigli. Ora ha ripreso a lavorare, in questi giorni, ma io ho perduto quattro mesi. Cercherò di riguadagnarli. E anche per questo ti prego di mandare l'Erodoto più presto che puoi. L'Antigone uscirà verso maggio. Affettuosi saluti e scusa se ti rispondo con ritardo. Tuo, Vittorini.³¹

²⁶ The translation was published in 1943 as Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, pp. 250-251, points out. I give here the full quotation of the edition as recorded by Camillo Sbarbaro's bibliography in Carla Angeleri; Giampiero Costa, *Bibliografia*, p. 127: *Antigone* (Milan: Bompiani, 1943); 2nd edition: *Antigone* (Milan: Bompiani, 1945).

²⁷ Angeleri; Costa, *Bibliografia*, p. 127.

²⁸ Angeleri; Costa, *Bibliografia*, p. 137.

²⁹ Angeleri; Costa, *Bibliografia*, p. 140.

³⁰ For an exhaustive study of these translations see Filippomaria Pontani, «*Gracili avena*»: *le versioni ultime, Pitagora e Pascoli in La dorata parmelia. Licheni, poesia e cultura in Camillo Sbarbaro (1888-1967)*, ed. by G. Magurno (Roma: Carocci, 2011), pp. 181-205. Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro controcorrente*, also places Sbarbaro's translation of Pascoli's Latin works when describing the years 1957-1958, p. 297. The translation was published posthumously in 1984: *Pascoli tradotto da Sbarbaro*, ed. by Vanni Scheiwiller in *Edizione non venale per gli Amici del Credito Italiani, con due scritti di Eugenio Montale, Manara Valgimigli e tre acqueforti a colori di Enrico Della Torre* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1984). Vanni Scheiwiller in the *Nota dell'editore*: 'Per gli estimatori della poesia di Camillo Sbarbaro le due traduzioni, da lui fatte per la R.A.I., e mai pubblicate, sono un non piccolo avvenimento letterario. Tra le carte affidatemi per lascito testamentario dal poeta ligure [...]. I due inediti di Sbarbaro sono, più che illustri, accompagnati da un artista finissimo e amico dei poeti come Enrico Della Torre', pp. 97-98.

³¹ *Caro Bompiani. Lettere con l'editore*, ed. by G. D'Ina, G. Zaccaria (Milan: Bompiani, 2007), letter n. 102, p.89.

Based on the history of these editions, unanimously agreed upon by Sbarbaro scholars,³² it has been possible to date the whole corpus of Sbarbaro's translations from Greek tragedy to his last poetic phase when he was composing *Fuochi fatui*. Through textual and stylistic analysis, archive research and examination of letter collections, this chapter will demonstrate the centrality of the translations of Greek tragedy in Sbarbaro's final work which completes his poetic trajectory by reconnecting with his poetic beginning.

1. "Camminare sulla corda" and "scrivere sotto dettatura": Sbarbaro's poetics of literal translation

The translations of *Antigone*, *Prometeo incatenato* and *Alceste* were commissioned by Valentino Bompiani for his series 'Pegaso teatrale. Teatro antico e moderno', as emerges from the letters exchanged between Sbarbaro and Bompiani (1942-1945).³³ The letters inform us of the translation projects in which Sbarbaro was involved, confirming his expertise as a translator from Greek and Latin. A note kept in the folder lists the following titles as possible further works to be translated by Sbarbaro: the *Guerra gotica* by Procopio of Cesarea, the second book of Herodotus' *Histories*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and Petrarch's *Lettere familiari*.³⁴ After being commissioned to translate *Antigone* and *Prometheus*, Sbarbaro became proactive towards this study of Greek theatre and expressed precise ideas

³² The scholars who treated the chronology of the translations are: Gina Lagorio, *Il Ciclope* in «Atene e Roma», n. 111 (1960); Bàrberi Squarotti, *Camillo Sbarbaro*, p. 239; Mesturini, *Antigone secondo Sbarbaro*, pp. 3-26; Mesturini, *Sbarbaro e il Ciclope di Euripide in Resine*, pp. 13-14; Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, pp. 247-262; Giampiero Costa, *Camillo Sbarbaro e Vanni Scheiwiller: lettere all'editore in Camillo Sbarbaro. Atti della giornata di studio 11 Aprile 2003* (Genova: Edizioni San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), p.114; Paolo Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 101.

³³ Only two specimens of this corpus of letters exchanged between the poet, the publishing house and his editor in chief at that time, Elio Vittorini, were published in *Caro Bompiani. Lettere con l'editore* ed. by G. D'Ina; G. Zaccaria (Milan: Bompiani, 2007). There is however a large folder of letters, completely unpublished, held by the Fondazione Corriere della Sera (where the Fondo Bompiani recently merged). Although the folder is registered in the catalogue of the Fondazione holdings, the material has not been physically found yet. I am in contact with the staff and waiting for further findings which will, hopefully, make it available for consultation. In the meantime I was able to read some of these letters in Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, who transcribed some excerpts in his monograph and from where I quote.

³⁴ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, pp. 51-52.

about what he would like to translate. In a letter dated 26 October 1943, Sbarbaro suggests Euripides' *Alceste* and the *Ciclope* and Aeschylus' *Persiani*:

Nell'eventualità che le comunicazioni si interrompessero, gradirei saperla d'accordo per i tragici greci; nel senso che, finito Barbey, mi metterei a: *Alceste* di Euripide, *Il Ciclope* di Euripide, ed avanzando tempo, a: *I Persiani* di Eschilo.³⁵

His commitment to translate *Prometeo incatenato* and *Antigone* prompted him to reread the whole corpus of Greek tragedy, as emerges from another letter sent by Sbarbaro to Bompiani on the 3rd of May 1944:

Caro Bompiani, La ringrazio della Sua cortesia e del desiderio che mi manifesta che per la Sua Casa io traduca qualche altra cosa del teatro greco. A mia volta La assicuro che divido anch'io questo desiderio. Solo la prego di volermi concedere dell'altro tempo per farle proposte concrete: sto rileggendomi a questo scopo quel che rimane della tragedia greca per fissare la mia scelta. Ho del resto, come Lei sa, ancora due di queste versioni da consegnarLe: l'*Alceste* e il *Ciclope* di Euripide.³⁶

A cross-analysis of two other collections of letters – that between Sbarbaro and Lucia Rodocanachi, and Enrico Falqui – offers valuable information for analysing Sbarbaro's approach to the translation of the Greek tragedians. In a letter dated Genova 25th of May 1942 Sbarbaro writes to Rodocanachi about his first impression of Sophocles' poetry:

[...] Ora mi sono messo a Sofocle; che subito mi ha *atterrito*. Ma placherò in qualche modo anche questo mostro.³⁷

Despite being concerned about the difficult task posed by this text, Sbarbaro is confident of his skills. Another letter written to Rodocanachi a month later (Genova, 22nd of June 1942) restates the poet's self confidence to tackle the task:

³⁵ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, pp. 55-56 quotes the letter written by Sbarbaro to Bompiani and dated 'Spotorno, 26 Ottobre 1943'.

³⁶ The letter, dated Spotorno 3rd of May 1944, is transcribed by Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 56.

³⁷ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Lucia. 1931-1967*, ed. by Davide Ferreri (Genova: Fondazione Giorgio e Lilli Devoto - San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2007), p. 75.

[...] Sto lavorando all'*Antigone* e, al solito, comincia a parermi che il camminare sulla corda sia meno difficile di quel che credevo.³⁸

The metaphorical expression *camminare sulla corda* is a key phrase to encapsulate Sbarbaro's idea of his role as a translator. The difficult mediation between the original and the translated is expressed through the idiomatic expression of a person's challenging balance when walking on a tight-rope. The rope also alludes to the very restricted space for personal intervention, an idea consistently elaborated by Sbarbaro himself as we can infer from two letters from Sbarbaro addressed to Bompiani. Sbarbaro writes to the publisher twice (24th November 1944 and 14th of January 1945) to express his dissatisfaction with the *Ciclope* and the other translations of Greek tragedy being published in the same series. Sbarbaro states that his translation of Greek tragedies aimed at adherence to the original ('*aspirano soprattutto ad essere quanto possibile aderenti al testo*') as opposed to that of the *Ciclope* which Sbarbaro defines a *risrittura*.³⁹ Sbarbaro's choice of a literal translation seems to allow very little room for original changes, and this should probably be the message to read in the aforementioned expression (*camminare sulla corda*). However, Sbarbaro's desire to stick closely to the original and his understanding of the translation of the Greek tragedy as a matter of subtle equilibrium, with small room for personal intervention, should not induce us to read these undertakings as free from interpretative effort.

The desire to adhere to the original and how to achieve this goal stylistically is expressed by Sbarbaro in another letter (Genova, 19th of July 1942) written to Rodocanachi:

Ho consegnato l'*Antigone*; io non ne sono (o: non ne ero) scontento; viceversa quello *stile legato* [my emphasis] che m'illudo renda qualcosa del testo, dev'essere dispiaciuto a Vittorini che fu qui un momento, diretto a Bocca di Magra (con un bel bambino. Demetrio). Peccato (oppure: fortuna) perchè con Sofocle non saprei comportarmi diversamente.⁴⁰

³⁸ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Lucia. 1931-1967*, p. 76.

³⁹ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 101.

⁴⁰ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Lucia. 1931-1967*, p. 77.

The *stile legato* relates to Sbarbaro's stylistic work on the text translated, a work mainly based on a wholly peculiar use of punctuation and on word ordering, which I will take into account in the section of this chapter devoted to textual and stylistic analysis of the tragedies. But the *stile legato* also hints at Sbarbaro's adherence to the text translated and to the metaphorical image of the poet walking on a thread elaborated by Sbarbaro.

However, Sbarbaro's fear of Vittorini's dissatisfaction turned out to be unnecessary as we can see again from another letter to Rodocanachi (Spotorno, September, 1943):

[...] Ho una notizia sola, buona, da darti; voglio dire: consolante per me. Come sai ero convinto che, a Vittorini almeno, la mia tragedia dal Greco fosse dispiaciuta. Invece Bompiani mi manda una lettera unicamente per dirmi che ha letto *l'Antigone con un grande godimento*; che devo tradurre delle altre tragedie per lui ecc. Meno male. Mi ha fatto molto piacere.⁴¹

From the letters we can see how Sbarbaro alternates between satisfaction and concern for the task of translating Greek tragedies as part of his publishing commitments. The only way he felt he could translate Sophocles was the *traduzione letterale*, as another letter to Enrico Falqui also confirms:

Mi imbarazza il fatto che chiede [i.e. Vittorini] delle versioni "moderne". Non saprei, con Eschilo o Sofocle, permettermi degli svolazzi. L'unica traduzione possibile mi pare quella letterale.⁴²

The letter draws again attention to the adherence to the original, to the literal translation as the only possible way for Sbarbaro to translate the text. The *versioni moderne* hints at the common practice in translation according to which the translator transforms passages which would sound obscure to a modern public and attempts to offer a valid equivalent in a modern context. Sbarbaro's consideration of this practice is quite frank: '*non saprei permettermi degli svolazzi*'. He identifies the modernizing approach to an ancient text with

⁴¹ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Lucia. 1931-1967*, p. 89.

⁴² Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Enrico Falqui. 1928-1967* ed. by Mirco Bevilacqua, Diego Divano and Daniela Carrea (Genova: Fondazione Giorgio e Lilli Devoto - San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2012), p. 53.

superficial and unnecessary rhetorical flourishes (*svolazzi*), and such rhetorical ‘flights’ are the opposite of his walking along-the ‘tightrope’ of literal translation. The translation of Greek tragedians is no easy task: it inspired Sbarbaro but also produced a sense of inhibition. Another letter addressed to Enrico Falqui (Genova, May 1942) clearly shows Sbarbaro’s ambivalence towards these translations:

[...] Ora mi sono messo a Sofocle! Vita di lusso! Niente da Longanesi, per ora; nè da quell’altro che mi scrivesti pel Greco. Ma trovo più divertimento a tradurre dei moderni. Troppa soggezione, gli Antichi!⁴³

From this letter, we first derive the image that Sbarbaro supremely enjoys translating Sophocles. The image is then immediately dismantled by the poet himself who confesses to his friend and literary critic his preference for the translation of modern authors. The *soggezione* exerted by the Ancients was also an active force which oriented Sbarbaro towards a literal translation and the interpretative side connected to it. The *divertimento* experienced when translating modern authors surely alludes to a fun dimension, but we cannot ignore, given Sbarbaro’s typical ambiguity, the etymological root of the word, *divertere* which means to divert. And it is this aspect indeed which discloses the different agenda behind the translation of the Moderns and of the Ancients. With the Ancients the desire is that of adherence, going deep to the core of the message while keeping the structure of the text as much as possible. With the Moderns the desire is that of escaping, transforming the text into something else and interpreting the original as only an occasion to develop, at times, a completely different content.

Notwithstanding the supposed *soggezione* exerted by the Ancients, Sbarbaro expressed his desire to translate more tragedies after he had translated Aeschylus and Sophocles, as revealed in a letter addressed to Bompiani where he confessed to the

⁴³ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Enrico Falqui*, p. 56.

publisher that he was rereading the entire canon of Greek tragedy in order to make a choice on what he would like to translate. The letters are therefore a valuable source of information to record Sbarbaro's fluctuating thoughts on the texts translated, but most importantly to monitor the shaping of a method employed while he was working on these texts: the metaphorical image of *camminare sulla corda* is then made explicit in the *traduzione letterale* and put into practice through a *stile legato*.

These remarks on translation extrapolated from the letters are to be integrated with Sbarbaro's thoughts on poetics and translations scattered in *Fuochi Fatui*. A key passage from *Fuochi fatui 1940-1945* is illuminating in helping us to interpret Sbarbaro's *stile legato* and his stylistic interpolations in the text translated:

Al lavoro di tradurre il compenso che non può mancare è il diletto che vi trovo; diletto, forse perché traducendo esaudisco le possibilità che mi restano di scrittore in proprio: modeste, se le appaga il giro dato a un periodo, una cadenza, la scelta d' un aggettivo.⁴⁴

The *diletto* Sbarbaro derives from translating is connected with his personal intervention in the text translated. The modesty of the pleasure taken from translation is determined by the supposedly limited ways in which Sbarbaro acts upon the text. The sentence shape, the adjective choice and the rhythm are where the poet-translator identifies his sphere of action. The overlapping figures of translator and poet are evident from this passage. The two figures mingle as Sbarbaro explicitly states that he expresses unexplored poetic ideas and formal solutions when translating. The *stile legato* mentioned by Sbarbaro in a letter to Rodocanachi (previously quoted), according to which the poet hopes to have rendered the original in the best way possible, is outlined here by the three stylistic devices. This passage shows Sbarbaro's awareness of the strong identity between himself as a poet and a translator, especially when it comes to making stylistic choices. The passage itself, is

⁴⁴ *OVP*, p.469. Interestingly enough *diletto* is used as an adjective referred to Greek language in *Scampoli*: 'riaffrontai col solo aiuto del vocabolario l'odioso latino e il diletto greco' in Camillo Sbarbaro, *Scampoli* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1960), n. 32, p. 86.

indeed one of those fragments in the book where theoretical indications about his poetics, here deeply intertwined with translation, are expressed with such accuracy and density of meaning that it is poetry itself, as De Robertis pointed out. The verb *appaga* links to the initial statement of pleasure (*diletto*) thus bringing the linguistic and stylistic remarks (*il giro dato a un periodo, una cadenza, la scelta di un aggettivo*) into a sensorial dimension.

Sbarbaro's awareness of his translation activity and the poetic inspiration involved in it, enrich the scope of translation in his work as a whole. The possibility (*esaudisco le possibilità [...] modeste che mi restano di scrittore in proprio*) of unveiling hidden concepts or ideas is restated, in his *Nota del traduttore* to the translation of Joris-Karl Huysmans' *A rebour* (*Controcorrente*).⁴⁵ The preface⁴⁶ offers another point of comparison between Sbarbaro's different agendas when he translates the Ancients and when he deals with the Moderns:

Traducevo allora a rottadicollo e accettai come accettavo qualunque proposta di traduzione, un po' per necessità familiari e più per *illudermi di scrivere ancora* [my emphasis]. Il testo che non conoscevo mi entusiasma e scartai *Volupté* che pure in gran parte avevo tradotto, rispondendo che non mi sentivo all'altezza del compito. Era vero ma in realtà *smaniavo di provarmi col nuovo* [my emphasis].⁴⁷

The author describes this period as incredibly intense as he was accepting every job offer he received. But this recollection should be taken with some caution. From the exchange of letters it has been possible to demonstrate that the authors to be translated were objects of intense discussion and that Sbarbaro refused to translate several works. Sbarbaro only translated what he felt he could do well, to use his own words.⁴⁸ However, from this passage

⁴⁵ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Controcorrente. Traduzione dal francese di Camillo Sbarbaro* (Milan: Rusconi, 1972).

⁴⁶ The first edition of the translation was published in 1944. Angeleri; Costa, *Bibliografia*, p. 130, inform us that Sbarbaro wrote the preface to this translation twenty years later.

⁴⁷ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Controcorrente*, p. 341.

⁴⁸ Another important exchange of letters between Sbarbaro and Einaudi, completely unpublished, corroborates the idea that Sbarbaro's predilection for the Moderns, expressed in the letter to Falqui, is at least ambiguous and it offers a valuable comparison for the translations of the Ancients. From the correspondence emerge several disagreements, or even silences about the works to be translated. The letters, typescripts and

we can draw two important points, namely his hope for a new creativity (*e più per illudermi di scrivere ancora*) and the desire to deal with new poetic ideas (*smaniavo di provarmi col nuovo*). When translating the Moderns, the novelty represented by the *Other* fuels the illusion of an enrichment coming from an unknown, unexplored source. By contrast, the solemnity of the Ancient guides Sbarbaro towards a literal translation and at the same time inspires him, as we will see from the analysis of his translation of Greek tragedy, to revisit his poetic past, the essentiality of *Pianissimo*. In the light of the author's views on the scarcity of his poetic voice, which also becomes a recurrent theme in poetry, as Polato has noted,⁴⁹ this enrichment connected with translation activity is particularly meaningful and appeared to have brought solace and satisfaction to the poet. The vital role of poetic expression in Sbarbaro's life and the comparison between his creative writing and translation is further reinforced in a late letter (Spotorno, Gennaio-Maggio 1967) to Enrico Falqui:

Sono grato al poco che ho scritto in proprio, perché m'ha aiutato a vivere; ma chi sa che il mio meglio non sia nelle traduzioni.⁵⁰

Sbarbaro's approach to translation of Greek tragedy, especially the expression of *camminare sulla corda* as a symbol of an equilibrium between the co-existence of two poetic voices, has to be read in light of another image of the poetic Self elaborated by the poet in *Fuochi fatui*, from where it is possible to gather some useful information on Sbarbaro's ideas about poetics and his method as a translator.

The preface to the book, where the poet expresses the reasons behind writing it, devotes a significant passage to the role of translation as something connected to his poetic silence. Starting from the title of the preface and the epigraph, the book connects with the

manuscripts, are kept in the folder containing letters referring to the period between 25.11.1941 and 12.12.56, and are kept in Archivio Einaudi.

⁴⁹ Polato, *Sbarbaro*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Lettere a Enrico Falqui 1931-1967*, p. 121.

Classical tradition. The title of the preface *Ars (iners) poetica* and the epigraph *Absens ades | m'ardi velata lampada vicino* start an intricate web of Classical references. The preface title *Ars (iners) poetica* immediately recalls Horace's *Ars poetica* but undermines the sense of an official declaration of poetics with the adjective *iners*, and perhaps it is linked to the idea of the poet as 'transcriber' and to the dimension 'sotto dettatura' which will be discussed later. As Zoboli demonstrated the direct source of the epigraph is Ovid's *Epistula ex Ponto* (2, 10, 49) written to his friend Pompeius Macer from his exile in Pontus (*hic es et ignoras et ades celeberrimus absens*).⁵¹ F. Pontani, a scholar who has devoted some attention to Sbarbaro's translation of Pascoli's Latin works, further problematizes the epigraph by interpreting the use of the adjective *absens* as a debt towards Pascoli. Pontani's reading of this passage as debt to Pascoli is supported by the fact that *absens* has been identified by Traina and Garboli as a thematic adjective in the Latin works of Pascoli, which were translated by Sbarbaro. In the light of this, Pontani quotes Pascoli's *Poesia* from *Canti di Castelvecchio* to further strengthen his point (I, ll. 1-5): *Io sono una lampada ch'arda | soave!* and (IV, ll. 55-59): *o quella [scil. lampada] velata, che al fianco | t'addita*.⁵² Pontani interprets this nexus of references and echoes within the crucial theme of Sbarbaro's poetry, which is *il santuario della famiglia* to use a line from *Antigone* translated by Sbarbaro.⁵³ In Pascoli's poem quoted by Pontani, *lampada* refers to the poet's mother. At this point, the issue of Sbarbaro's dedications enriches the network of references. Pontani agrees with Zoboli's conjecture regarding the dedicatee of the book: Sbarbaro's dear friend Elena De Bosis Vivante. Pontani, also on the basis of Lagorio's study of Sbarbaro's lifelong relationship with Elena Vivante, interprets the rapport between the two friends as being similar to that of a mother and a son. The meaning of the *lampada* then is fully contextualized in a family dimension thanks

⁵¹ Paolo Zoboli, *Il motivo di un libro (sulle dediche di Sbarbaro)*, in G. Devoto, P. Zoboli, eds., *Camillo Sbarbaro. Atti della giornata di studio. 11 Aprile 2004* (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2003), pp. 68-69.

⁵² F. Pontani, «*Gracili avena*», p. 203.

⁵³ All references from *Antigone* are from the first edition: Sofocle, *Antigone*, ed. by Camillo Sbarbaro (Milan: Bompiani, 1943), p. 49.

to this web of hidden references and reasserts the centrality of the theme to Sbarbaro's poetics. The family theme expressed by this epigraph is not the only connection with the myth of Antigone. The term *lampada* in fact was used by Sbarbaro long before he had translated Pascoli's Latin poems, and it appears in Sbarbaro's translation of the *Antigone* as almost a perfect transliteration of the Greek term λαμπάδος. It is in the fourth episode where Antigone dialogues with the chorus and she is preparing herself to be buried alive in the cave (ll. 877-882). The passage contains the key theme of the Eros denied to Antigone and her subsequent marginalization and creation of a parallel universe in the underworld where she will rebuild her family nest and her funereal wedding will take place. With this choice, Sbarbaro colours the epigraph with all the nuances mentioned above and anticipates one of the main themes of the book, the memory of the beloved family members.⁵⁴ The preface to *Fuochi fatui* can therefore be considered a manifesto where Sbarbaro invites the reader to consider the entire trajectory of his poetic quest and to read the various books as connected by his ultimate objective, the 'ritratto'. The book, presented after some years of silence, institutes a connection between the poet's translations and his last book, and the poet comments on his fragmentary ideas which he refers to as asterisks:

Il giorno che mi trovai in capo il primo di questi asterischi (per gratitudine accolto tra gli altri), nel trasferirlo a buon conto sulla carta, non mi immaginavo che m'era venuto in mano il bandolo di una matassina che, cinque anni dopo, ancora non avrei finito di dipanare. [...] Ma questa volta uscivo da un silenzio durato tre lustri (il periodo delle frenetiche traduzioni): inevitabile il sospetto di aver per strada perduto la voce e il bisogno d'una riprova fuor di me.⁵⁵

Sbarbaro's suspicion of having lost his personal voice during his translation activity is further complicated by his comparison between himself as a poet and a transcriber:

⁵⁴ Davide Puccini, *Lettura di Sbarbaro* (Florence: Nuovedizioni Vallecchi, 1974), pp. 137-153; Zoboli, *La linea figure*, pp. 265-284.

⁵⁵ *OVP*, pp. 421-422.

Capii allora che come a scrivere non m'ero rimesso di proposito, era illusione credere che di proposito potessi smettere; nato da sé, *senza mio intervento altro che quello di decifrare e trascrivere* [my emphasis], anche questa volta il libretto da sé si sarebbe fatto a mio scapito o vantaggio non importa se era necessario. Ancora una volta obbedivo: [...] al bisogno [...] di compiere insomma il ritratto, spero non solo mio, al quale chiamato mi misi da quando fui in grado di esprimermi.⁵⁶

The dimension of *scrivere sotto dettatura* is expressed again in the pages immediately following the preface of *Fuochi fatui*:

Scrittore, lavorai sempre a intermittenza; [...] Di non avvertire alcuna sollecitazione a scrivere, accettavo con la stessa passività con cui, avvertendola, vi avevo ubbidito. Non mi misi mai di proposito davanti a un foglio bianco; per aver pubblicato, non sentii mai d'aver contratto impegni, neppure con me stesso. *Lavorai* non è quindi la parola giusta; se la frase non si prestasse a interpretazioni metafisiche, direi che scrissi sempre sotto dettatura.⁵⁷

The dimension of writing *sotto dettatura*, or as simply 'transcribing' recalls the image of the translator *che cammina sulla corda* and connects the two figures more strongly if we think that the book was written during the period when Sbarbaro's activity as a translator was particularly intense. Both images allude to a limited space for intervention. The comparison becomes meaningful because the metaphor of *camminare sulla corda* was elaborated by Sbarbaro when he was translating Sophocles' *Antigone*. The image of writing *sotto dettatura*, used by Sbarbaro in relation to his own poetry, stresses the poet's limited freedom and connects with the translator's role. As we have seen before, the direct contact with the text and the mediation between his voice and that of the author translated was expressed in his stylistic development which Sbarbaro identified in the pace of the phrase, the rhythm and the lexical choices. Furthermore, his translating experience and the exegetic contact with the Ancient texts prompted to him poetic reflections expressed in his last book. Another example of how Sbarbaro connects the possible evolution of the links between words and images to the activity of translations can be found again in the *Fuochi fatui* 1940-1945 sections:

⁵⁶ OVP, pp. 421-422.

⁵⁷ OVP, p. 427.

Dopo anni di silenzio, capita che le parole più prendano in bocca un sapore uno spicco insoliti. Lievitano, si direbbe; aggalano da sé, precise e insieme ispirate. È il vocabolario che si rivergina come alla sua stagione l'albero rinverdisce. Capisco allora che sarebbe tornato il tempo di esprimermi, ma esito ad approfittarne come a entrare in acqua chi teme dopo tanto tempo d'aver disappreso a nuotare.⁵⁸

Lexical choice is here deeply connected to the regenerative function which is implicitly attributed to translation. The temporal indication *dopo anni di silenzio* hints at the period devoted to translation which can be read as an incubator for words, for the recreation of the fleshly bond described by Sbarbaro between the word and his poetic Self. The *parole precise e ispirate* are the result of a process of rejuvenation of Sbarbaro's poetic vocabulary produced by silence and translation. The novelty, the refreshment here alluded to is the benefit coming from translation where Sbarbaro experiences the word of the *other* (deriving from it a new colour), feeds his hope for new poetic inspiration (*illudermi di scrivere ancora*) and prompts him to rethink his poetic past. Translation of Greek tragedy, on account of the thematic consistency with Sbarbaro's poetic ideas and the formal equilibrium between prose and poetry, offered him a major opportunity to rejuvenate his poetic vocabulary and to find the poetic inspiration necessary to write his last book.

2. Literal translation and the core of tragedy

The *poetica dell'aderenza* was outlined by Sbarbaro himself in an exchange of letters between the poet and Valentino Bompiani.⁵⁹ The letters revolve around the complicated editorial history of the *Ciclope*, which Sbarbaro translated first in prose and then in verse.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *OVP*, p. 479.

⁵⁹ Selected parts of these letters, mostly unpublished, are quoted by Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 101.

⁶⁰ This is the history of the *Ciclope* editions in brief. The first edition is in prose: Euripide, *Il Ciclope. Dramma satiresco*. Nella versione di Camillo Sbarbaro. Introduzione di G. Galloni, disegni di S. Cerchi (Genoa: Editrice Ligure Arte e Lettere, 1945). After this we have another first edition of the *Ciclope* together with the *Alceste*: Euripide. *Alceste. Il Ciclope. Traduzione dal greco di Camillo Sbarbaro for Pegaso teatrale. Teatro antico e moderno* (Milan: Bompiani, 1952). The second edition in verse: Euripide, *Il Ciclope. Dramma satiresco di*

His translations of Greek tragedies aimed at adherence to the original (*'aspirano soprattutto ad essere quanto possibile aderenti al testo'*),⁶¹ but the *Ciclope* was translated with different criteria, mostly that of complete reinvention, and this translation was considered a proper rewriting rather than a faithful rendition. This is the reason behind Sbarbaro's decision to withdraw the *Ciclope* from the series where *Antigone* and *Prometeo incatenato* had already been published. The *poetica dell'aderenza* is also the differentiating element in his translation of the Classics from that of French authors. As emerges from a letter addressed to Giovanna Bemporad, Sbarbaro describes his method of translating Zola's *Germinal* as *infedelissimo*:

Cara Giovanna, (il foglietto è macchiato di caffè. Non farci caso). Ho letto subito la tua *Elettra* e si è rinnovata la mia ammirazione per il tuo modo di tradurre; questa volta, non conosco e non potrei leggere il testo; ma sento che come per Omero la traduzione è insieme aderentissima eppure un'opera d'arte a sé. Ben diverso il mio modo di tradurre perché sono infedelissimo (*Germinal*, per esempio, l'ho tradito; da romanzo terreo, tetro è diventato quasi...giocoso).⁶²

It is evident from this letter that the translation process is very different from what is previously found in his exchange of letters with Rodocanachi, Falqui and Bompiani. In this passage the author even puns with the topos *tradurre-tradire*. Literal translation is thus not a consistent approach to all translation by Sbarbaro but, I argue, specific to his versions of Greek tragedy. The aim of literal translation can be better understood in the light of a significant incident recalled by critic Carlo Bo who happened to be in a class taught by Sbarbaro for a few months. His memory confirms Sbarbaro's use of the literal approach while stressing the poet's originality in the learning process:

Euripide (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1960). There is then a third edition: *Euripide, Il Ciclope. Traduzione di Camillo Sbarbaro* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965).

⁶¹ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici*, p. 101.

⁶² Anna Benucci Serva, *Cara Giovanna. Lettere di Camillo Sbarbaro a Giovanna Bemporad (1952-1964)* (Milan: Edizioni Archivio del '900, 2004), pp. 69-70.

Io sono in grado di portare [...] una testimonianza diretta perché ho avuto la fortuna di avere Sbarbaro come insegnante di greco, sia pure per pochi mesi: comunque quel breve periodo è stato sufficiente per fornirmi dei dati che hanno poi soccorso la mia natura di lettore. Tanto per cominciare Sbarbaro non era un professore né insegnava come un professore: era piuttosto un innovatore senza dirlo ma sicuro del proprio metodo che era poi quello della partecipazione, della comunicazione fra discente e docente. Leggeva in quell'anno 1928 che facevo la seconda liceo l'*Antigone* e la leggeva come si legge una notizia di cronaca su un giornale: parola per parola, quasi si trattasse di una traduzione interlineare, senza commenti estetici, senza riferimenti storici, ma con appena qualche rapida e marginale notazione che doveva aiutare lo studente a non perdere il punto centrale della tragedia. Era un modo di lavorare umilissimo e che a qualche spettatore o uomo del mestiere avrebbe anche potuto apparire pedestre ma l'impegno del professor Sbarbaro era proprio quello di non aggiungere nulla che potesse distorcere il senso originale del testo, nulla che suonasse come inutile amplificazione retorica. Anche da questo punto di vista per Sbarbaro contava soltanto il testo: non faceva sfoggio di scienza filologica che pure possedeva né – tanto meno – si richiamava alle estetiche di moda di quel tempo.⁶³

Sbarbaro's attention to the single word (*parola per parola*) is part of a pedagogic discourse, which I will discuss in chapter 4 of this thesis. Philological and aesthetic expertise, though present, is muted to maintain focus on the text itself. Sbarbaro's didactic methodology coincides with his translation approach. The scant remarks made by the poet were understood by Bo as Sbarbaro's way of helping the student to better understand the core of the tragedy. The passage confirms the poet's rejection of rhetorical amplification, the *svolazzi* mentioned in the letters quoted previously. The literal translation, here described by Bo as almost interlinear, however, is not disconnected from a structured interpretative effort.

Between 1900 and 1928 there had been fundamental works by philosophers and scholars on translation issues. The debate brought to the fore the importance of translation as a linguistic practice and generated a broad theoretical debate which laid the foundations for the future of translation studies. Walter Benjamin's seminal essay *The Task of the Translator* was published in 1923, five years before Sbarbaro's first encounter with the translation of the *Antigone*. It is very unlikely that Sbarbaro could have read the essay. However, Benjamin's argument can help to illuminate Sbarbaro's methodology. Benjamin

⁶³ Carlo Bo, *Com'era Sbarbaro*, pp. 10-11. See also C. Bo, *Il debito con Sbarbaro* in *Otto studi*, preface by S. Pautasso (Genoa: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2000), pp. 105-117.

ends his essay with a comparison between the translation of Sophocles and that of the Holy Scriptures. Benjamin points to a difference between a text in which there is a risk of the sense being lost in the depths of language, referring to Sophocles, and a text where there is no need for a mediation on meaning as it is immediately apparent, as in the case of the Holy Scriptures. The dimension of the revelation, in its Judaic meaning, and the rationale connected to it are absent from Sophocles and from tragedy as a whole, as Steiner demonstrated.⁶⁴ Yet Greek tragedy is the place where the concept of revelation and unveiling of truth worked not only as a narrative engine but also as the interpretative key to the ultimate meaning of ethics and morality. The consequences that such truths unveiled generated a vigorous debate on morality and ethics for which tragedy has become, especially for the modern audience, the archetype. Going back to Benjamin's question at the end of his essay, it is worth asking what kind of consequences the dimension of revelation produces in translation. For Benjamin the whole issue becomes a matter of trust since 'just as language and revelation must be united in text, literalness and freedom must be united in the form of interlinear translation. For to some degree all great writings, but above all the Holy Scriptures, contain their virtual translations between the lines. The interlinear version of the Holy Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation.'⁶⁵

Benjamin's argument can be applied to Sbarbaro's translation of Greek tragedy. His literal translation pursues the objective of recreating a text, which naturally reveals itself through the word ordering. In the light of this interpretation Sbarbaro's use of literal translation and his fondness for a word order that reflects the original as well as the recreation of rhetorical devices when possible acquire a profounder meaning.⁶⁶ After having

⁶⁴ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 6-10.

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator in Illuminations* ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 82.

⁶⁶ An example of this way of proceeding can be seen in Sbarbaro's translation of the 1.590 'κυλίνδει βυσσόθεν | κελαινὰν θίνα' with *nera rena* where the alliteration between κυλίνδει and κελαινὰν is rendered by Sbarbaro with 'nera rena'. Another similar intervention is made by Sbarbaro in the first stasimon at l. 339 where the

examined the overlap between the figure of the translator and that of the writer as both oriented by the voice of the *Other* as we saw in the cross-analysis of the collection of letters and *Fuochi fatui*, the choice of literal translation reveals an ideological intention. Sbarbaro builds his translation of Greek tragedy from an understanding of the text, which can be defined as almost ‘biblical’. The reverential attitude towards the text and the idea that only a literal translation would be suitable are implicitly informed by Sbarbaro’s conviction that by reproducing the Greek word ordering the revelation aspect in the original would become available to the modern reader as well. Aesthetic interpretation or other rhetorical devices should not obscure the core of the tragedy, which was the ultimate goal of Sbarbaro’s translation. In this essentialist interpretation, which is however not deprived of ideology and can indeed be read for interpretative clues as well, lies Sbarbaro’s method and understanding of Greek tragedy. Uprooted from its religious and political context, Greek tragedy becomes for Sbarbaro the occasion to rethink his own poetic images and to augment his poetic vocabulary. Translating word for word meant for Sbarbaro a *journey* through his own personal poetic vocabulary which led him to a rethinking of his first poetic experience of *Pianissimo*.

The quest for what Bo called ‘the core of tragedy’ (*il punto centrale della tragedia*) was indeed the quest for his poetic awareness stimulated by the grand themes of humankind as contained in the poetic archetype of Greek tragedy. Benjamin’s reference to Hölderlin’s *Antigone* helps us to interpret what Sbarbaro meant by the core of the tragedy: it is similar to Hölderlin’s quest for the *Grundton*, the general colour of the text sought by the German poet in his *Antigone*. Antoine Berman in his essay *Hölderlin: le national et l’étranger* described how the poet-translator fostered a methodology in which literal translation

alliteration of the letter ‘α’ in the line ‘ἄφθιτον, ἀκαμάταν, ἀποτρέεται’ is translated with ‘immortale, instancabile, affatica’.

merged with the interest in etymology, producing what we can call an *etymologizing literalness*.⁶⁷ The example used by Berman to demonstrate this mechanism is *Antigone's* line 20, in the prologue, when Ismene asks Antigone the reason for her troubled mood: 'Τί δ' ἔστι; δηλοῖς γάρ τι καλχαίνουσ' ἔπος.' It is worthwhile comparing Sbarbaro's translation of this line with that of Hölderlin. The German poet translates the line with 'Was ist's, du scheinst ein rottes Wort zu färben', which translated into English would be 'What's the matter? You seem to paint a red/purple word'. Sbarbaro's translation reads: 'Che è? Sento che ribolli d'una parola che t'urge dentro.'⁶⁸ What we can see here is the fact that both translations pursue the same desire to go to the primary meaning of the word καλχαίνω which literally means 'to make purple'. The difference is that Sbarbaro aims at maintaining meaning rather than pursuing a literality that would almost confine with the absurd, as it is in Hölderlin's case. Sbarbaro therefore avoids what Benjamin denounced as one of the dangers of the literal translation: 'Hölderlin's translations are subject to an enormous danger inherent in all translation: the gates of a language thus expanded and modified may slam shut and enclose the translator with silence'.⁶⁹

Using the word 'ribolle' Sbarbaro in fact activates the Italian native speaker link between the verb *ribollire* and the noun *sangue* thus recreating the etymological meaning of καλχαίνω through the expression: 'ti ribolle il sangue'. Sbarbaro does not get lost in the depths of language: he pursues meaning while maintaining the etymological meaning of καλχαίνω. In addition to this, Sbarbaro colours the line with a concept very dear to his poetics: the urgency of the word (*una parola che t'urge dentro*). The interest in literality as a means to access the core of the tragedy, the etymological research and the respect for the word ordering are indicative of Sbarbaro's meditation on the text of Greek tragedy as

⁶⁷ Antoine Berman, *Hölderlin: le national et l'étranger* in *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 250-278.

⁶⁸ Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator*, p. 82.

guided by a precise desire to make the text reveal itself through the original collocation of words without depriving it of its meaning.

3. The translation of Sophocles' *Antigones*: lyric and dramatic solutions

Sbarbaro's poetic *oeuvre* contains two passages that come from the translation of Greek tragedy, where lines of the text translated become part of his poetic memory and surface in his writings. It is not a systematic operation but much more a free associative mental mechanism. However, the insertion is interesting as it unveils the interiorization of a portion of text and its place in the author's poetic memory. The quotation of the first line of *Antigone's* stasimon is found in *Cartoline in franchigia. Lettere a Angelo Barile* (1966)⁷⁰:

Con pezzi di carbon fossile perduti da qualche carro ho scritto sugli scogli tra Varigotti e Noli *l'eros anicate machan...* E' Marzo, c'è il sole e presto a capo Matapan fiorirà la *Lavatera maritima*. È come già sentissi cantare le campane di Pasqua e m'accorgo ogni giorno più di amare la vita...⁷¹

The line, quoted by Sbarbaro as a transliteration, is extrapolated from the third stasimon of *Antigone* (ll.781-805) where the chorus sings a hymn to Aphrodite and Eros. The stasimon employs the vocabulary of war, which is consistent with the previous argument between Haemon and Creon, and describes the power of Eros who can reduce into slavery even the wisest people or Gods. The tragic wedding between Antigone and Haemon which will follow, and the morbid identification between eros and death represented by the wedding in the underworld, is anticipated by this ode to the invincible power of Eros:

⁷⁰ The other passage is from the translation of Aeschylus' *Prometeo incatenato* and merged as a quote in Sbarbaro's *«Trucioli» dispersi* ed. by Giampiero Costa and Vanni Scheiwiller (Milan: Libri Scheiwiller, 1986). It is the line 252 'Π. τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατώκισα (l. 252P) | Pr. Misi ad abitare in essi le cieche speranze.' Sbarbaro quoted the line on blind hope in one of his *«Trucioli» dispersi* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986), n. [146], p. 95: «Misi ad abitare in essi le cieche speranze» si gloria in Eschilo il benefattore degli uomini; ed è in Pindaro la definizione: «Speranze, sogni che si han da desti.» Ma l'averne fatta tutta la vita l'esperienza non toglie che l'ultima speranza è anche la più ambiziosa.' As Zoboli demonstrated, p. 98, footnote 274, the line is not part of an original ode but it was attributed to Pindar by Stobeus, and Sbarbaro followed that interpretation.

⁷¹ *OVP*, p. 548

Pianissimo. In the original Greek, the passage is built circularly: the end of the ode reconnects with the first line and reasserts the lack of logic in the situation and the weakness of human beings. Eros is invincible while Aphrodite mocks everyone without even fighting. The playful dimension of the last line links with the light tone and the remark on youth (*che sulle morbide gote | della fanciulla stai in agguato*) which had previously introduced a series of contrasts annihilated by the power of Eros. The element of youth is also the occasion for the poet to translate ἕμερος, the term for erotic desire, with a striking image ‘l’umido sguardo dell’amabile fanciulla’. To fully understand the reason for this change we need to consider that tears are, in Sbarbaro’s poetry, the final springs of life against the dryness of the alienated Self, represented by the correlative objective of the stone (a natural element very present in *Pianissimo*). Erotic desire is always paired with a sense of guilt in the poet’s perceptions but is also the engine which prompts self-consciousness and awareness of a state of marginalization, especially in *Pianissimo*.⁷³ In this passage, Sbarbaro creates an identification between eros and tears, absent in the original, on the basis of his reading of Antigone’s destiny. Through the negation of eros, explicitly lamented by Antigone in the fourth episode (l. 877, ἀνυμέναιος) when she is preparing to be buried alive and to reconnect with her family already in the underworld, the heroine perceives her marginalization from society which condemns her to death. The use of this image is guided by the reading of the power of Eros made by Sbarbaro. This pair of eros and death becomes a common thread uniting the translations of *Antigone* and *Alceste*. The metaphor of ‘ciglia umide’ is consistently elaborated in the two tragedies and appears to have informed the variant ‘ciglio asciutto’ in the poem *Padre che muori tutti giorni un poco* from *Pianissimo*. The evolution from the ‘occhio asciutto’ (in the 1914 edition) to the ‘ciglio

⁷³ Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, *Camillo Sbarbaro*, p.52.

asciutto' (in the 1960 edition) is inspired by the passages translated. The correction should be read in the light of Sbarbaro's translation of the epilogue of *Alcesti* at ll. 1046-1048:

Ἄδμητος

οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην τήνδ' ὀρώων ἐν δώμασιν
ἄδακρυς εἶναι: μὴ νοσοῦντί μοι νόσον
προσθῆς: ἄλις γὰρ συμφορᾶ βαρύνομαι

Admeto

Non richiamarmi a mente con quest'incarico la mia sciagura. A vedere questa donna aggirarsi per la reggia restare a ciglio asciutto non potrei.⁷⁴

Sbarbaro derives inspiration from the translations of these passages and inserts the metonymy as a variant in *Padre che muori tutti giorni un poco*, one of the most important within the collection for it brings together the conflictual relationship with the father. Faced with his father, the poet has the *ciglio asciutto* and throughout the poem he restates his inability to cry in front of him thus stressing the state of erotic paralysis and inhibition created by the father. The paralysis has a profounder meaning: in Sbarbaro erotic desire is the mechanism that arouses awareness of man's alienation just like the poetic word does. The inhibition of erotic desire therefore implicitly suggests the poet's incapability of performing the poetic act, conceived as a moral duty.

The metonymy of 'ciglio' used for the eyes is employed again to describe Admetus mourning Alcestis' death at ll. 597-605:

Χορός

καὶ νῦν δόμον ἀμπετάσας
δέξατο ξεῖνον νοτερῷ βλεφάρῳ,
τᾶς φίλας κλαίων ἀλόχου νέκυν ἐν
δώμασιν ἀρτιθανῆ:

Coro

Pur oggi la casa spalancandogli,

⁷⁴ All references are from Camillo Sbarbaro, *Alcesti. Il Ciclope di Euripide* (Milan: Bompiani, 1952), p. 69.

accolse, sebbene avesse umido il ciglio, lo straniero;
 sebbene la cara moglie piangesse
 da poco morta in casa.⁷⁵

The intersection of the theme of tears and eros is further expanded and enriched by Sbarbaro in his translation of the *Antigone* and *Alcesti* where the pair intermingles with a family context. The centrality of the theme of family in Sbarbaro's poetry is restated in the figures of the two Greek heroines who are deeply entangled with a dark destiny. If Sbarbaro reaffirms the importance of family in these tragedies, it is always in a funereal dimension. His identification with Antigone is at its strongest when the heroine longs for the underworld metaphorically expressed by the pair sleep-death, two personifications very present in Sbarbaro's collection of poems *Pianissimo*. Squarotti⁷⁶ has demonstrated how Sbarbaro annihilated the superiority of the 'nido pascoliano' as the ultimate shelter for the preservation of the human element, by asserting the coexistence of family affection and its dissolution into alienation, especially evident in the poem *Esco dalla lussuria*.⁷⁷ The funereal dimension of *Antigone* and *Alcesti*, with the recreation of a parallel life in the underworld after being rejected by their own family affection reinforces Sbarbaro's mythopoietic act. Through these translations what is openly reasserted is the poet's awareness of the absurdity of human existence and the total alienation of the human being who can find no solace in family, love, friendship or any other human relationship. On the basis of this conception of poetry the relationship between the pair sleep and death becomes a fundamental one and it is the main theme orienting Sbarbaro's translation of *Antigone* and *Alcesti*, heroines who respond to the marginalization and cruelty imposed by society by choosing a life amongst the dead. This theme finds a perfect fit in Antigone's recreation of her family nest in the underworld, a passage which Sbarbaro intensively reworks. This is a

⁷⁵ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Alcesti*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Squarotti, *Camillo Sbarbaro*, pp. 47-60.

⁷⁷ *OVP*, pp. 25-26

passage where Antigone is comparing her destiny to that of another heroine, Niobe, and in this way she anticipates her own future, that of being imprisoned alive in a cave by Kreon. In the fourth episode, Antigone is dialoguing with the chorus who are lamenting her miserable fate. The theme of wandering and walking towards the last light introduces Antigone's speech (ll. 823-833) which unveils the major topics of Sbarbaro's poetics:

Ἀντιγόνη

τὰν κισσὸς ὡς ἀτενῆς
 πετραία βλάστα δάμασεν,
 καί νιν ὄμβροι τακομέναν,
 ὡς φάτις ἀνδρῶν,
 χιῶν τ' οὐδαμὰ λείπει,
 τέγγει δ' ὑπ' ὄφρῦσι παγκλαύτοις
 δειράδας: ᾗ με
 δαίμων ὁμοιοτάταν κατευνάζει.

Antigone

A guisa d'edera tenace
 una vegetazione di pietra
 la imprigionò. Lei che si strugge, piovge
 - è fama -
 e neve mai lasciano;
 e bagna dalle ciglia sempre in pianto i fian-
 [chi. Ad essa, me
 somigliantissima il destino mette a dormire.⁷⁸

The stone is the correlative objective recalling the poet's condition of aridity. The vegetation, usually a positive element in Sbarbaro's poetry, in the form of ivy creates a prison where the Self is caged and alienated. Then the natural elements of the snow and rain anticipate the theme of tears again expressed by the 'ciglia' metonymy and introduce the allegory of death. The translation of the syntagm δαίμων κατευνάζω with 'il destino mette a dormire' while being a literal and faithful translation is also resonant of one of Sbarbaro's main poetic themes: the intersection between the personification of sleep and death as an inescapable destiny. In the poem *Sonno, dolce fratello della Morte* this connection is evident:

⁷⁸ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, p. 78.

Sonno dolce fratello della Morte,
 che dalla vita per un po' ci affranchi
 ma ci rilasci tosto in sua balia
 come gatto che gioca con il gomito;
 di te, finché la mia vita giustifichi
 la vita della mia sorella e un segno
 che son vissuto anch'io finché non lasci,
 io mi contenterò e del tuo inganno.⁷⁹

Sbarbaro's characteristic stylistic features such as the postposition of the verb and the use of punctuation to achieve a paratactic pace of the phrase recur in the translations while mingling with the principle of respecting word ordering and the interest in morphological calques. But if the punctuation in his original poetry was used to create an oscillating rhythm, in the translations Sbarbaro exploits this tool to intervene in the text in two directions: to isolate nuclei dear to his poetics and to enlarge rhythmical units in Italian which would recreate the original length of the Greek metre. Especially in the lyric sections the literal translation and the desire to adhere to the original, conveyed by the respect for word order, intermingle with the poet's interpretative effort and stylistic goals.

An example of the use of punctuation which helps the poet to problematize a passage where one of Sbarbaro's main themes is encapsulated at the very beginning of the prologue of *Antigone*, at ll. 1-10:

Ἀντιγόνη

ὦ κοινὸν ἀυτάδελφον Ἰσμῆνης κάρα,
 ἄρ' οἶσθ' ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
 ὅποῖον οὐχὶ νῶν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ;

Antigone

Mia compagna di destino, sorella cara,
 Ismene, del retaggio di Edipo sai un male,
 sai quale, Zeus non avvererà mentre noi
 due siamo ancora in vita?⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *OVP*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, p.15.

Sbarbaro's interpretative effort is subtle yet evident. The poet isolates the sister within the first sentence: he stresses its grammatical function (apposition) through the insertion of two commas, separates it from 'Ismene', which is moved to the beginning of the second verse, and refers *κάρρα* (head) directly to the sister (*sorella cara*). The poet maintains the phonetic similarity between *κάρρα* and *cara* as well as the position within the sentence. The lexical choices are also indicative of Sbarbaro's revealing work on the text. Translating *κοινὸν* (common) with *compagna* is ambiguous if we consider the use of the term in Sbarbaro's poetry. The term is in fact often paired with the word *perdizione* as we can see from at least three occurrences in *Pianissimo*. Sbarbaro by choosing the word 'compagna' in this translation is also evoking this link with perdition and proposing the co-existence of myth of family affection in an erotic context thanks to a lexical choice. This aspect has been identified by George Steiner as one of the key factors determining the huge success enjoyed by *Antigone* for the entire Nineteenth century. In the first part of his book *Antigones*, Steiner traces the reasons which consecrated Sophocles' *Antigone* as the most perfect work of art ever produced according to Idealist and Romantic criteria. One of the reasons he offers is that in the relationship between brother and sister the issue of sexuality, and the estrangement inherent in it, are present yet sublimated in the element of *φιλία*.⁸¹ Sbarbaro's translation and his lexical choice do not achieve the positive synthesis proposed by Steiner in the element of sisterliness as a means to defy alienation. On the contrary the author maintains the tension between the erotic and family spheres by creating ambiguity. This aspect is further enriched by another connotation of the term *compagna* in the poem *Ora che non mi dici niente*. The text is a hymn to *Dolore* as the only feeling perceived as possible by the alienated poetic Self. The numb condition (*mi tocco per sentire se sono*) depicted in the middle of the poem introduces the description of a life which cannot be

⁸¹ George Steiner, *Antigones. The Antigone myth in Western literature art and thought* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), pp. 16-17.

lived, but is always seen from the outside, from the detached condition of the poet. In this passage, Sbarbaro uses the term *compagna*, which refers to this usual condition of not feeling anything, and it prepares for the invocation of *Dolore* which pairs with the personification of life (*Vita*):

[T]'odio, compagna assidua dei miei giorni,
che alla vita non mi sottrai, facendomi
come il sonno una cosa inanimata,
ma me la lasci solo rasentare.
[...]
Voglio il Dolore che m'abbranchi forte
e collochi nel centro della Vita.⁸²

The term *compagna* is also more explicitly referred to another personification in Sbarbaro's poetry. This is in the poem *Nel mio povero sangue qualche volta*, from *Pianissimo*, where the poetic Self is now experiencing the other condition of his double situation. Alienation, the numb condition and dryness alternate with a stark desire to live, identified by Sbarbaro with the pair of pleasure and pain which are always connected with the presence of death (*Mi cresce l'ansia dentro di morire / senza avere il godibile goduto / senza aver il soffribile sofferto*). In the same poem the personification of perdition, *Perdizione*, is paired with *compagna*:

[C]on per compagna la Perdizione
a cuor leggero andarmene pel mondo.⁸³

The term 'compagna', however, maintains an ambivalent vestige in the light of another poem where Sbarbaro explicitly mentions his sister and their journey through life. It is the poem *Forse un giorno, sorella, noi potremo*, from *Pianissimo*:

Forse un giorno, sorella, noi potremo
ritirarci sui monti, in una casa,

⁸² OVP, p. 30.

⁸³ OVP, p. 49.

dove passare il resto della vita.
 Sarà il padre con noi anche se morto.
 Noi lo vedremo muoversi per casa.
 E allora capirà tutto il dolore
 che traversammo uniti per la mano,
 tu, la vita, sorella, senza amore,
 io la vita, sorella, senza inganni.
 [...]
 E vivremo così in compagnia
 dei maggior fratelli, i fiumi e i boschi,
 pacificati con la nostra sorte.
 Perché ciò sia, sorella, io faccio patto
 che il mio dolore duri quanto me,
 anzi di giorno in giorno mi s'accresca.⁸⁴

The poem is significant inasmuch as the father's presence hovers over the siblings just as in *Antigone's* prologue. The poem daydreams about the creation of a family nest, just as Antigone does in the fourth episode (ll. 891-902). The heroine connects death, eros and family: she identifies her graveyard with the wedding chamber and the only joys she can derive from this identification is that of seeing in the underworld the rest of her family:

Ἀντιγόνη

ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς
 οἴκησις ἀείφουρος, οἱ πορεύομαι
 πρὸς τοὺς ἑμαυτῆς, ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς
 πλεῖστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων:
 [...]
 ἔλθοῦσα μέντοι κάρτ' ἐν ἐλπίσιν τρέφω
 φίλη μὲν ἤξειν πατρί, προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί,
 μήτηρ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα:
 ἐπεὶ θανόντας αὐτόχειρ ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ
 ἔλουσα κάκῳσμησα κάπιτυμβίους
 χοὰς ἔδωκα.

Antigone

O tomba, stanza nuziale, sotterranea dimo-
 ra che per sempre mi guarderai, dove i
 miei raggiungerò che quasi tutti già Per-
 sefone ha accolto tra i morti!
 [...]
 Là tuttavia ho ferma speranza che il mio
 arrivo sarà gradito a te, padre; a te, ma-
 dre; caro a te, mio fratello beneamato, se,
 morti di mia mano vi lavai e composi e
 versai libagioni sulla vostra tomba.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *OVP*, pp. 43-44.

Going back to the poem it is interesting to see how the poet and his sister are together in the dimension of pain which differs for both of them: in a life without love, in the sister's case, and in a life without deception, in the poet's as he refers to his ruthless and fierce self-consciousness expressed by his poetic word. The pain (*dolore*) is personified in this poem (as it is in several other poems from *Pianissimo*), but it is described as a shared dimension which bonds the poet to his sister, just like Antigone to Ismene. The dimension of 'being together' is here rendered through the periphrasis '*uniti per la mano*' whereas the semantic field of 'compagno, compagnia' is here used for the spiritual connection felt by Sbarbaro with the element of nature encapsulating the idea of a pre-established path of life thanks to the use of the word *sorte*: *E vivremo così in compagnia | dei maggior fratelli, i fiumi e i boschi, | pacificati con la nostra sorte.*

The translation of the beginning of the *Antigone* activates Sbarbaro's poetic memory and inspires him to make a few changes which are evident in the lexical choices and in the use of punctuation. The sister is identified as the interlocutor and is syntactically isolated by the use of commas. The choice of the word *compagna* recalls the two poles around which Sbarbaro's poetic experience is built: the alienated, cynical and dry condition of the poetic Self and the morbid desire for physical pleasure inextricably connected with death and sense of guilt. The syntagm *compagna di destino* unveils another intervention by Sbarbaro's poetic voice in the text and recalls a key notion of Greek tragedy: the belief that life is a pre-assigned condition of pain. Such a condition is always invoked and treasured by Sbarbaro as it represents the only link left with a non-alienated reality. The sister partakes of this condition of pain and this shared dimension temporarily bonds the poet to his family nucleus.

⁸⁵ Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, pp. 81-82.

Sbarbaro stretches the length of the opening lines by inserting a parenthetical clause. Through the use of punctuation, he introduces a pause that is not in the original. The image of sunlight (*raggio del sole*) begins the first line and expands to the end of the second one (*luce*). The city of Thebes sits between these images of light. The commas in the original are rendered with two dashes thus imposing a longer pause and yet respecting the original versification of the text and word order. In terms of imagery Sbarbaro maintains the two metaphors at the beginning of the parodos, the sun's ray and the 'pupil of the day'. He makes small changes aimed at enhancing the strength of the images. For instance, at ll. 108-109, the metaphor of the sun which makes the horse of Argos' king run faster is slightly reworked. In the original we have the image of the horse being urged with a sharper bit. Sbarbaro's translation 'pianta con più furia lo sprone nel cavallo' stresses the dynamism of the scene. Instead of keeping the image of the bit (*χαλινός*) which conjures up the change of direction rather than the speed of the action, Sbarbaro uses the word 'sprone' (spur). Together with the added complement 'con più furia' he continues the image of flight from the previous line 'in fuga hai cacciato' (*φυγάδα*) while creating an assonance and an alliteration (*in fuga...con più furia*).

From these examples it appears that Sbarbaro's translation of the choral sections enhances the lyric quality of the original. This is done by reproducing the disposition of the lines of the original and by respecting the word order. At the same time, he introduces new pauses to the text thus stretching the rhythmical units of the single lines. The syntax is often more contorted than in the original and the verse often lingers on the reader's ear until it finds the verb, usually placed at the end of the sentence. Rhetorical devices also often enrich the lyric sections. The most used is alliteration, mainly employed in the same places where the original Greek also has it. When translating these tragedies Sbarbaro produces echoes of his main poetic themes, all expressed in *Pianissimo*. The lyric parts are

where the grand themes of *dolore*, of *pietrificazione* and *alienazione dell'io* intermingle with the tragedy's themes. Sbarbaro's need for tears, as a metaphor for the constant quest for life in an alienated Self, is given full freedom of expression in these tragedies where family issues and mourning intertwine with a desire for death. However, his awareness of his status as a poet often generated irony and sarcasm in his poetry. The dramatic parts of the translation are where this satirical vein is given more space. The prose is less dense and supports the change of register. In the alternation between the choruses and the dramatic parts we can see the quest for balance between the verticality of the lyric sections which evoke universalising moral reflections, and the horizontality of the prose which has found the object of meditation outside the Self. The translation of Greek tragedy represents the ideal place where this formal equilibrium may be practised. We can see this tension, the alternation between prose and poetry, put into practice within these translations which therefore offer a synthesis never fully achieved by Sbarbaro in his other books.

Sbarbaro's translation also offers a key change of register which reflects a similar change in the original. The first episode in *Antigone* stages the presence of Kreon who shares his political views with the Chorus regarding the traitors to the city. The tone is solemn. Kreon asks the Elders to watch over his orders and Polynices' corpse, for someone might disobey his laws and be corrupted by money. Before the chorus has the chance to reply to Kreon's speech, the entrance of the sentry interrupts the dialogue. His appearance (ll. 223 ff.) introduces the second part of the stasimon and it immediately lightens the tone with his almost comical words:

Φύλαξ

Ἄναξ, ἐρῶ μὲν οὐχ τάχους ὑπο
 δύστινους ἱκανῶ κοῦφον ἐξάρας πόδα.
 Πολλὰς γὰρ ἔσχον φροντίδον ἐπιστᾶσεις,
 ὁδοῖς κυκλῶν ἑμαυτὸν εἰς ἀναστροφήν·
 ψυχὴ γὰρ ἠῦδα πολλά μοι μυθουμένη·

«Τάλας, τί χῶρεις οἱ μολῶν δώσεις δίκην;
 τλήμων, μενεῖς αὖ; κεί τάδ' εἴσεται Κρέων
 ἄλλου παρ' ἀνδρός, πῶς σὺ δητ' οὐκ ἀλγυνῆ;»
 Τοιαῦθ' ἔλίσσον ἦνυτον σχολῆ ταχὺς,
 χούτως ὁδὸς βραχεῖα γίγνεται μακρά.

[...]

Φράσαι θέλω σοι πρῶτα τὰμαυτοῦ· τὸ γὰρ
 Πρᾶγμ' οὔτ' ἔδρασ' οὔτ' εἶδον ὅστις ἦν ὁ δρῶν,
 Οὐδ' ἄν δικαίως ἐς κακὸν πέσοιμί τι.

[...]

Καὶ δὴ λέγω σοι τὸν νεκρὸν τις ἀρτίως
 θάψας βέβηκε κάπῃ χρωτὶ διψίαν
 κόνιν παλύνας κάφαγιστεύσας ἅ χρή.

Guardia

Re, non ti dirò che arrivo senza fiato da tanto ho corso lesto. Al contrario! Quante volte i pensieri m'han fermato per via e fatto voltare per tornarmene! Il cuore mi diceva: 'Infelice! Perché vai dove appena giunto verrai punito! – «Ah ti fermi, insensato? E se Creonte viene a sapere da altri, come puoi sperare di non pagarla cara? » In questi pensieri m'indugiavo: e ci ho messo a far la strada! Anche corta diventa lunga a questo modo una strada! [...] Lascia che dica prima di me. Né ho fatto la cosa io né ho visto chi l'ha fatta. Per cui sarebbe brutta che toccasse un guaio a me. [...] Le notizie, se son brutte, ce ne vuole a buttarle fuori. [...] Ecco, dico. Qualcuno, poco fa, seppellito il morto, si è squagliato; dopo avergli gettato sopra terra asciutta e compiuto riti d'uso.⁸⁸

Griffith described this character as 'one of the more colourful characters in Greek tragedy'.⁸⁹

Sbarbaro does not fail to represent this character with an appropriate change of register and an accurate vocabulary choice. Colloquial expressions such as 'tanto ho corso lesto', 'pagarla cara', 'ce ne vuole a buttarle fuori', 'si è squagliato' characterize the sentry's speech. He is very much responsible for driving the plot and his constant fear creates an ironic and sarcastic point of view on the situation. At the same time, the sentry is no monolithic character incapable of other tones. It is on these occasions where Sbarbaro takes advantage of the choice of poetic prose in order to descend to a more comical and ironic tone, also typical of some of his late poetry (especially the *Fuochi fatui*). The translation again is not free from interpretation despite being faithful to the original. For instance at ll. 256 ff. the sentry describes a fight scene which could be a comical scene, but Sbarbaro here inserts some verses also reminiscent of his own poetry:

⁸⁸ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, pp. 30-31.

⁸⁹ Griffith, p. 165.

Φύλαξ

Οὐκ οἶδα· ἐκεῖ γὰρ οὔτε του γενῆδος ἦν
 πλήγμ', οὐ δικέλλης ἐκβολή· στυφλὸς δέ γῆ
 καὶ χέρσος, ἀρρώξ οὐδ' ἐπημαξευμένη
 τροχοῖσιν, ἀλλ' ἄσημος οὐργάτης τίς ἦν. [...]
 Λόγοι δ' ἐν ἀλλήλοισιν ἐρρόθουν κακοὶ,
 Φύλαξ ἐλέγχων φύλακα, κᾶν ἐγίγνετο
 πληγὴ τελευτῶσ', οὐδ' ὁ κωλύσων παρῆν.

Guardia

Non so. Sul posto non si notava scasso di vanga né palata di terra: il suolo era sodo e asciutto, non rotto né solcato da ruote. [...] Scoppiarono tra noi male parole. Una guardia incolpava l'altra; e minacciava di finire in botte né c'era chi lo impedisse.⁹⁰

'Scoppiarono tra noi male parole' is one of those perfect *endecasillabi* scattered throughout his translation. The line is also another intersection with Sbarbaro's poetry and the use of the verb *scoppiare* probably activated Sbarbaro's poetic memory and therefore the use of the metre. For instance, in the poem *Lacrime, sotto sguardi curiosi* the poet asserts the frailty of his emotional condition and connects it to the vain nature of his words:

Lacrime sotto sguardi curiosi
 non mi scoppiate a un tratto mentre parlo
 di vane cose (mi sovviene a un tratto
 del mio cammino sotto cieli bui,
 non avendo una mano che m'incuori;
 e l'inutilità di ciò che dico
 di ciò che faccio mi fa grave il cuore).⁹¹

The poetic memory of *Pianissimo* surfaces and creates a connection between tears and words, thus colouring the translation of the passage with a lyrical tone. The comic character of the sentry, and the dramatic part generally, are often nuanced through poetic echoes of Sbarbaro's original writing thus showing the poet's consistent use of his poetic memory when dealing with both the dramatic and the lyric parts of the translation.

⁹⁰ Camillo Sbarbaro, *Antigone*, p. 32.

⁹¹ *OVP*, p. 34.

4. The choice of poetic prose

Sbarbaro wrote only one preface to his translations of Greek drama, for Euripides' *Alceste* and *Ciclope*. This introduction is the most extended and articulated piece written by the author on Greek theatre. Here he outlines his thoughts on Greek tragedy through a comparison between Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides:

Con Euripide si verifica nella tragedia greca una violenta frattura. Se precise indicazioni di tempo mancassero, chi crederebbe l'autore di *Alceste* contemporaneo di Sofocle? Questi non era meno acuto psicologo di Euripide; ma mentre l'amore del vero porta Sofocle a tratteggiare al più qualche macchietta (vedi nell'*Antigone* quella così efficace della guardia) che, relegata al posto di comparsa, serve con la sua presenza ad accrescere la verisimiglianza e con la sua ombra a dare risalto ai grandi caratteri dominanti nel suo teatro; il verismo apertamente malevolo di Euripide inquina tutti i personaggi e li abbassa a uomini e peggioro [sic], siano essi, re eroi o numi. [...] L'intreccio, assente si può dire in Eschilo, e lineare in Sofocle, si complica in Euripide, da far nascere la necessità di un prologo che illumini il pubblico sull'antefatto [...]. A turbare definitivamente la severa linea classica, fa la sua comparsa un acceso romanticismo e la cavillosa discussione sofistica; e s'inaugura l'uso e l'abuso di tutti gli espedienti teatrali (colpi di scena e riconoscimenti eccetera) che passeranno poi in eredità alla commedia nuova. Il coro preponderante in Eschilo, si impoverisce, perde contatto con l'azione [...] lo stile eloquente in Eschilo e intenso in Sofocle, si fa discorsivo sino a rasentare la sciatteria.⁹²

From this passage it is evident that Sbarbaro understands how Sophocles' *amore del vero* results in *grandi caratteri dominanti* and also *qualche macchietta*. To recreate this aspect, and the contrast between an elevated tone and a lower one, the poet translator makes a stylistic choice: the use of poetic prose, which allows a change of register and a more wide-ranging representation of the characters. However, this choice is also an important intersection between Sbarbaro's translations of Greek tragedy and his poetics. The poet's oscillation between prose and poetry is a constant feature in his creative work. In these translations Sbarbaro has the chance to mix his lyric voice together with his prosaic fragments. This stylistic solution signals the elaboration of one of the most important turning points in his poetic life: the declaration of his poetics which becomes poetry itself in *Fuochi fatui*. Eugenio Montale, in an article written in memory of the poet, described

⁹² *Alceste. Il Ciclope di Euripide. Traduzione dal greco di Camillo Sbarbaro*, pp. 5-8.

what poetry was for Sbarbaro: *Scrivere era per lui attendere il momento in cui maturasse la dettatura...da parte di chi?*⁹³ Montale here refers to the image of the transcriber used by Sbarbaro himself in the preface to *Fuochi fatui*. The interconnection between the image of Sbarbaro writing *sotto dettatura* and the metaphor of himself *che cammina sulla corda* when translating Greek tragedy offers a comprehensive image of how the poet felt he could experience the poetic word. The literal translation of Greek tragedy and the metaphorical image used by Sbarbaro himself for this activity helps us understand the poet's evolution in shaping a distinct poetics, as it emerges in the preface to *Fuochi fatui*, that of a transcriber writing under dictation.

Fuochi fatui is also a book that looks backward to Sbarbaro's poetic origins, which is to say to *Pianissimo*.⁹⁴ The author himself pointed to this inward perspective at the end of his preface:

Rimasto nelle cose che dico fedele a me stesso, se poi anche nel modo di dirle è vero che mi sono per naturale decantazione spogliato fin dove possibile di letteratura, riaccostandomi alla povertà di *Pianissimo*, avrei assolto il mio compito. Dice il poeta: Soltanto ciò che torna al suo principio | ciò che si chiude in circolo, è perfetto. | Perfetto, cioè etimologicamente, compiuto.⁹⁵

The desire to return to the beginnings thus bringing his poetic trajectory full circle appears to be fundamentally mediated by translation. This analysis of Sbarbaro's collections of letters, archive documents, poetic oeuvre and his translations of Greek tragedy has revealed a relationship with the Classical tradition which finds its expression on several levels. Pedagogy and translation commitments were the occasions through which the poet was able to develop his fondness for Greek tragedy and to make it relevant to his thought. The translation of the *Antigone* does not only symbolically begin the translation period nor is

⁹³ Eugenio Montale, *Sulla poesia*, p. 337.

⁹⁴ The title *Fuochi fatui* is the one that the poet had thought of for his very first collection of poems, *Resine*, as the poet says in Camillo Sbarbaro, *Il mio "primo vagito"*, ed. by Giovanni Farris (Savona: Sabatelli, 1982), pp. 5-7.

⁹⁵ *OVP*, p. 422.

just the result of publishing commitments, but it also shaped Sbarbaro's awareness of himself as a poet. The difficult task posed by this text, the methodology elaborated *ad hoc* to tackle the assignment and the sense of reverence towards these texts are aspects deeply consonant with his conception of poetry and of the necessity of his poetic word.

The most illuminating aspect arising from the experience of translating Greek tragedy is to be found in the development of the metaphor elaborated by Sbarbaro for his relationship with poetry as a whole. The metaphor of the translator *che cammina sulla corda*, elaborated by Sbarbaro in the context of his translations of the tragedians, anticipates that of the poet who writes *sotto dettatura* expressed in *Fuochi fatui* and the metapoetic meditation mixed with the remarks on translation present in the book.

The choice of poetic prose for the translations of Greek tragedy conveys Sbarbaro's interpretative effort, his desire to preserve the word order in his translation without sacrificing meaning. This aspect is mostly evident in the lyrical sections where we also find phenomena such as etymological calques (especially evident in the use and creation of compounds) and rhetorical devices aiming at the recreation of sounds present in the original.⁹⁶ Dramatic parts are where the prose is given more freedom and where the poet's sarcastic vein is explored. These sections are also intertwined with Sbarbaro's way of making poetry as we can find several hendecasyllables scattered throughout these parts recreating connections with the prosaic hendecasyllables of *Pianissimo*. This oscillation, which found full expression in *Fuochi fatui*, begins in these translations where the moral investigation offered by the themes of the original tragedy successfully mingles with Sbarbaro's fundamental lines of poetic development. Poetic prose is also the means through which Sbarbaro achieves this goal: the prose allows the poet to be more in command of

⁹⁶ Just to give a couple of examples of compounds and etymological calques created by Sbarbaro to reproduce the original Greek see the parodos of *Antigone* at l. 106 where the adjective 'λεύκασπιν' is rendered with 'biancoscudato'; *Prometeo incatenato* at l. 88 the adjective 'ταχύπτεροι' is translated with 'aliveloci'.

collocation of words and lexical choices as well as making syntactic alterations to isolate passages dear to his poetics (visible in the use of punctuation and parenthetical clauses). Considering the metapoetic meditation and its interconnection with translation, expressed in the form of poetic fragments, present in *Fuochi fatui*, we should understand these translations of Greek tragedy as the achievement of equilibrium between a lyrical and prosaic mode inspired and mediated by his practical experience of translation.

Sbarbaro's ultimate goal is to produce a harmonious translation where stylistic flourishes do not affect his principal aim: namely a translation that would preserve meaning rather than create obscurity and opacity, despite these being present in the original. The poet-translator avoids the risk of getting lost in the depths of language, as often happens when choosing a literal approach. Sbarbaro's translations of Greek tragedy might fall into that category of translations that George Steiner would include in his first periodization where he places translation theories which stemmed from direct and practical work on translations.⁹⁷ However, Sbarbaro's versions are also to be read beyond this category, as from this practice he was able to refine a meditation on translation deeply intertwined with his own quest for the poetic word.

The necessity of writing under the constraints of another voice expressed by Sbarbaro in the preface of *Fuochi fatui*, and reminiscent of his limited freedom of action when translating Greek tragedy, is a turning point overlapping with his constant concern with the dryness of his poetic voice. It is indeed from this apparently disabling condition that Sbarbaro derives his poetic strength and inspiration. Sbarbaro's translations are not merely stylistic exercises, even if the inspiration coming from Greek syntax is strong and evident, but they were the occasions for the poet to rethink his own poetry. It is no coincidence that translations of Greek tragedy are all read through the filter of *Pianissimo*.

⁹⁷ George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of language and translation* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), pp. 236-237.

Sbarbaro revisited through these translations themes and tropes expressed in his first collection, which remains the pivotal achievement of his poetry.⁹⁸ It was after the rethinking of these themes through the translations of Greek tragedy, that Sbarbaro was able to state with no uncertainty, as is evident from the *Fuochi fatui* preface, what he had pursued since *Pianissimo*. His desire to reconnect with that first experience, thus reasserting its importance, is encompassed in the final part of his poetic trajectory through the meditation inspired by the translation of Greek tragedy. These translations were not carried out just to respect his publishing commitments or as a mere stylistic experiment, but are an integral part of Sbarbaro's poetic *iter*, linking its opening and concluding phases.

⁹⁸ Mengaldo, *Camillo Sbarbaro: 'Pianissimo' rimane certo il documento fondamentale della poesia di Sbarbaro e uno dei capitali del primo Novecento*, p. 321.

Chapter 3

Giovanna Bemporad and the Classics: translating Greek tragedies

1.0. Giovanna Bemporad's early poetic translations of Greek tragedy: "Muova da essi il *mio* inizio"

Giovanna Bemporad (1923-2013) was an Italian poet of Jewish origins and a translator of classical and modern languages who contributed to the field of poetic translation from Greco-Roman literature in a way that knows few parallels in twentieth-century Italian literature. The uniqueness of her work as a translator is twofold. First, Bemporad translated almost the entire canon of Western literature.¹ Second, and this is wholly peculiar to some of her translations of the Classics, Bemporad retranslated the same text many times, hence offering evidence of how she conceived her work to be never quite finished but always in progress.

Her relationship with classical literature is deeply rooted in her own poetic discourse. Bemporad, in an interview, compared her activity as a translator of poetry to a journey into world literature, a journey in which her fascination with literary archetypes was her guiding star:

Il mio percorso, pur così accidentato, pieno di dubbi, di smarrimenti, di incertezze su quello che doveva essere il metro, il ritmo, il linguaggio, i contenuti della poesia del secondo Novecento, ha avuto uno svolgimento tutto sommato abbastanza coerente. Sono partita dalla poesia pura dei lirici greci e da Leopardi, che si può considerare l'ultimo dei greci, e dopo aver attraversato – considerando Virgilio il primo dei poeti decadenti – tutti gli istmi della poesia europea (anche il barocco e il liberty) sono approdata e ritornata come in un cerchio che si chiude, alla poesia più assoluta, primigenia, che è all'origine di tutta la letteratura occidentale,

¹ Let us begin with the number of authors and works translated by Bemporad. In chronological order, we have Virgil's *Aeneid*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Trilogia della passione*, Novalis, *Inni alla notte* and *Canti spirituali*, Hugo Von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* and the *Cantico dei cantici*. In addition to this, we should include the translations comprised in her collection of poems *Esercizi*: poems from the *Atharvaveda*, Sappho's fragments (2, 4, 94 and 96), Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, Hölderlin, George and Rilke. To this list, we should add the significant number of unpublished translations that I was able to discover during my archival research. Bemporad translated the works of G. G. Byron, J. Milton, R. Frost, J. Keats, D. Thomas, P.B. Shelley, W. Shakespeare, P. Eluard, C. De Pizan, H. Von Kleist, G. Trakl, M. Lermontov, A. Machado, Horace, Theocritus, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles.

al libro dei libri: l'*Odissea* di Omero.²

From this excerpt it appears that her 'literary' journey began with Greek lyrical poetry and ended with the *Odyssey*.³ The fact that Greek literature marks the beginning and end of her 'circular' quest suggests the prominence of the classical legacy in her poetic thought. The affinity between her translations of the classics (especially her anthologies of the *Aeneid* and of the *Odyssey*) and her book of poems *Esercizi* is all the more significant considering the unyielding effort put into the numerous re-editions of these texts.⁴ However, Bemporad's kinship with classical antiquity extends further than the horizon sketched so far. My research in Bemporad's personal archive led to the discovery of a large corpus of translations from the three Greek tragedians, namely Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. This discovery underlines all the more cogently that, as a translator, she was principally attracted to Greek literature. Moreover, such an extensive work on the Greek tragic genre calls for a reassessment of Bemporad's engagement with Greek literature and of its legacy

² From an interview typescript draft, densely annotated by the author's handwriting, and kept in a miscellaneous folder without a title. This document, together with Giovanna Bemporad's personal library and archive, has been recently acquired by *Centro Apice* of the University of Milan.

³ The importance of Bemporad's translation of the *Odyssey*, especially considering the time she devoted to this work, is worth considering. However, due to space constraints, I cannot treat this aspect in the present chapter. On her translation of the *Odyssey*, in chronological order, see: Fritz Bornmann, *La traduzione dell'Odissea di Vanna Bemporad* in "L'Approdo letterario", XVII, 53, 1971; Enrico Falqui, *L'Odissea dal video al testo e la galleria dei traduttori di Omero*, in "Il Dramma", 11-12 (novembre-dicembre, 1970); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Odissea*, in "Nuovi Argomenti", n.s. 22, 1971; Maurizio Perugi, *Odissea* in "Paragone", XXII, 254, 1971; Giovan Battista Pighi, *L'Odissea della Bemporad*, in "Il Popolo", 31, gennaio 1971; Emanuele Trevi, *Giovanna Bemporad: L'Odissea di Omero*, in "Nuovi Argomenti", III serie, 46, aprile-giugno 1993; Andrea Rodighiero, *L'Odissea di Giovanna Bemporad in «Un compito infinito». Testi classici e traduzioni d'autore nel Novecento italiano*, ed. by F. Condello; A. Rodighiero (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2015), pp. 229-244.

⁴ In chronological order the editions of the *Aeneid*, of the *Odyssey* and of the *Esercizi*: *Gli eroi: antologia dell'epica per la scuola media*, a cura di Lorenzo Braccisi, con le nuovissime traduzioni dai poemi classici di Giovanna Bemporad (Bologna: Edizioni scolastiche Patron, 1965); Virgilio, *Dall'Eneide*, Giovanna Bemporad, introduzione di Luca Canali (Milan: Rusconi, 1983); Virgilio, *Dall'Eneide*, Giovanna Bemporad, introduzione di Luca Canali (Roma: Forcom, 2000). Le edizioni per l'*Odissea*: Omero, *Odissea*, versione di Giovanna Bemporad, prefazione di Giovanni Battista Pighi, sceneggiatura e dialoghi di Giampiero Bona, Vittorio Bonicelli, Fabio Carpi, Luciano Codignola, Mario Prosperi, Renzo Rosso per la co-produzione televisiva RAI, Ortf, Bavaria e Dino De Laurentis (Turin: ERI, 1968); Omero, *Odissea*, versione di Giovanna Bemporad, prefazione di Umberto Abini (Turin: ERI, 1970); Omero, *Odissea. Canti e frammenti*, versione poetica di Giovanna Bemporad, introduzione di Maurizio Perugi (Florence: Le lettere, 1992). *Esercizi. Poesie e traduzioni* (Venice: Urbani e Pettanello, 1948); *Poesie e traduzioni* (Fermo: Tipografia La Rapida, 1963); *Esercizi. Poesie e traduzioni* (Milan: Garzanti, 1980); *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi*, ed. by Andrea Cirolla (Milan: Edizioni Archivio Dedalus, 2010); *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi*, ed. by Valentina Russi (Bologna: Luca Sossella editore, 2011). Unless otherwise stated, all references to the *Esercizi* are from the Garzanti edition, which faithfully reproduces the 1948 edition.

in her own œuvre.

Over the course of merely four months (from July to October 1940), as the dates on the manuscripts indicate, Bemporad translated eight Greek tragedies. In chronological order they are Euripides' *Medea* (10 - 15 July 1940), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (27 July - 3 August 1940), *Hippolytus* (3 - 8 August 1940), *Heracleidae* (23 - 26 August 1940), *Bacchae* (12 - 17 September 1940; here we know the approximate time when the translation was completed: 'notte'), Aeschylus' *Persians* (8 October 1940: the manuscripts are incomplete and we only know when the translation was started); Sophocles' *Electra* (10 - 20 October 1940) and Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* (here too the manuscript is incomplete: we are told that the translation was started on the 21st of October 1940).⁵

In this chapter, for lack of space, I shall just focus on Bemporad's translation of Sophocles' *Electra*. This text, together with Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* and Euripides' *Electra*, forms a virtual triad about the Argos dynasty which occupies a truly unique place in the ancient canon, as far as we can judge from the surviving materials.⁶ Bemporad's fascination with Electra's character began with Sophocles' tragedy. She continued to explore this figure through the translation of Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*. Interestingly, Bemporad translated the only play of the trilogy focussing entirely on the character of Electra. Her interest in the Greek heroine was subsequently further developed in her translation of Hofmannsthal *Electra* (1981), which is based on Sophocles' version of the myth.⁷ I propose to read these translation choices as evidence of an explicit interest in and fascination for this mythical figure. In particular, as I will argue in this chapter, the

⁵ I give here the starting and ending dates as shown in the manuscripts.

⁶ Guido Avezzi, *Sofocle, Euripide, Hofmannsthal, Yourcenar. Elettra. Variazioni sul mito* (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), pp.7-8, described it as a 'trilogia trasversale': '[...] Eschilo, Sofocle ed Euripide nelle rispettive *Elettra*, a distanza di anni l'uno dall'altro, enfatizzando questa o quella componente della storia, sviluppando questo o quel personaggio, proponendo all'azione esiti qualitativamente diversi, offrono una visione prismatica dell'episodio centrale. A noi, che non possiamo leggere che una parte minima della produzione drammatica antica, questa "trilogia trasversale", priva di paralleli, offre una possibilità unica [...] di esplorare le potenzialità drammaturgiche e i diversi trattamenti di un singolo episodio della narrazione mitica'.

⁷ Hugo Von Hofmannsthal, *Elettra*, traduzione di Giovanna Bemporad (Milan: Garzanti, 1981).

translation of Sophocles' *Electra* had a significant impact on Bemporad's poetic discourse. It was her first encounter with Greek literature and, at the same time, it is an original work of poetry. In other words, her poetic translation of *Electra* is one of the earliest examples of that inextricable dyad of poetry and translation, which is the essence of Bemporad's work and the fundamental cornerstone of her poetics.

A study of the collection of letters (1940-1943) between Carlo Izzo and Bemporad provides appropriate historical contextualization for these translations. These documents refer to more translations of Greek tragedies (which I have been unable to locate in the archive) thus evidencing an even larger corpus of translations. These indirect sources are of great importance for an accurate assessment of Bemporad's encounter with Greek tragedy and its influence on her work. The epistolary exchange offers a useful insight into Bemporad's poetic *officina* at the time and it also testifies to Bemporad's and Izzo's passionate interest in metrics. Remarks and thoughts on prosodical issues are scattered throughout the entire corpus. Izzo's comments range from Bemporad's confidence in the hendecasyllable to allusions to different metrical experimentation (for instance the *esperimento barbaro*).⁸ In this respect, the poetic translation of Sophocles' *Electra* can be regarded as a 'pristine sample' which allow us to see Bemporad's early theoretical ideas put into practice. By all means, her *Electra* can be considered a metrical workshop where we witness her research (referenced in the letters) on the hendecasyllable as well as her use of other metrical forms such as the *quinario* and the *settenario*.

It goes without saying that the choice of the hendecasyllable raises the issue of Bemporad's dialogue with the Italian poetic tradition. Specifically, at the heart of the matter is how Bemporad drew on this tradition in her translation of Sophocles' tragedy. It is perhaps no coincidence that the poetic echoes traceable in Bemporad's version belong to

⁸ Paola, Magi; Vincenzo, Pezzella, eds., *Carlo Izzo. Lettere a Giovanna Bemporad 1940 - 1943*, (Milan: Archivio Dedalus Edizioni, 2013), p. 21.

poets who greatly contributed to the metrical debate and to the field of translation from the classics. Giacomo Leopardi's influence is particularly prominent and it involves different aspects. Leopardi's presence in the translation can be felt in Bemporad's tendency for Leopardian vocabulary, digressions in which she introduces Leopardian motifs, and in the fact that her approach to translation is indebted to his translation theories. Firstly, the very nature of Bemporad's poetic translation of Sophocles' *Electra* is indebted to Leopardi's ideas on the poetic function of translating Greek poetry. Bemporad attempts 'to initiate a poetic moment' by means of translation, or as Leopardi puts it, to create that moment in which 'la mente tumultua'.⁹ Bemporad's translation of Sophocles' *Electra* was not a mere stylistic exercise. The poetic version is an attempt to create the conditions that would trigger the moment of poetic inspiration and to allow poetic creation to take form.

Apart from Leopardi, other voices are clearly discernible in her poetic engagement with Sophocles' *Electra*. Giuseppe Ungaretti's defence of the hendecasyllable largely resonates in Bemporad's ideological choice of the metre, unveiling her poetic agenda behind this translation.¹⁰ Giovanni Pascoli's monumental contribution to the translation of the Classics left a complex legacy in Bemporad's work and has been understood in diverse ways by scholars who devoted their attention to Bemporad's poetic translations.¹¹ As far as

⁹ Giacomo Leopardi to Pietro Giordani in a letter written on the 21st of March 1817: "Ella dice da Maestro che il tradurre è utilissimo nella età mia, cosa certa e che la pratica a me rende manifestissima. Perché quando ho letto qualche classico, la mia mente tumultua e si confonde. Allora prendo a tradurre il meglio, e quelle bellezze per necessità esaminate e rimenate a una a una, piglian posto nella mia mente, e l'arrichiscono e mi lasciano in pace", now in Franco Brioschi; Patrizia Landi, eds., *Giacomo Leopardi. Epistolario*, 2 vols, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri), I, p. 71.

¹⁰ Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Difesa dell'endecasillabo in Vita di un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, ed. by M. Diacono; L. Rebay (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), pp. 154-169. Bemporad had a long friendship with Giuseppe Ungaretti, who was also one of her wedding witnesses when she married in 1957. In the video-interview edited by Giuseppe Pezzella, *Giovanna Bemporad. A una forma sorella. Intervista video-ritratto* (Milan: Archivio Dedalus Edizioni, 2011), p. 35: "[...] Ungaretti, e ti ho anche detto che aveva una grande ammirazione per la mia poesia, mi metteva fra i grandi che lui amava, con mio gran stupore, e poi mi telefonava quasi ogni sera, facevamo, prima che morisse, grandi conversazioni culturali, sulla cultura del Metaponto, perchè lui era lucano, e quindi era molto legato alla cultura della Magna Grecia, un grande personaggio, veramente un grande personaggio e ha lasciato anche degli scritti molto belli."

¹¹ Umberto Albini, in his introduction to Bemporad's poetic translation of the *Odyssey* (1970), was the first to mention Pascoli's influence on Bemporad's work ("Qua e là affiora anche Pascoli, García Lorca"). Maurizio Perugi, in his review of the *Odisea* in «Paragone», XXII, 254, (1971), 129-135, further developed Albini's

the poetic translation of Sophocles' *Electra* is concerned, Pascoli's influence can be identified in the prosodic solutions shown by Perugi in his review of Bemporad's poetic version of the *Odyssey*, such as the expansion of the rhythm beyond the metrical unit thanks to a significant use of vowels.¹² Yet, in the *Electra*, Bemporad focuses her attention on the elastic potential of the hendecasyllable as a verse capable of hosting a variety of rhythmical units.

In view of space constraints, I shall limit myself to discussing a number of passages which I believe are representative examples of the poet's substantial work on Sophocles' *Electra*.¹³

The translation of *Electra* played a significant role in the early stage of Bemporad's poetic journey. The whole corpus of Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedies date to the early years of Bemporad's original poetry, which reveals a profound bond between early poetic investigation and the translation of Sophocles' *Electra*. The opening section of the

critical input. Perugi argued that Pascoli's influence on Bemporad's *Odyssey* is manifold. Firstly, Perugi pinpointed Bemporad's references to *Traduzioni e riduzioni*. Second, Perugi claimed that Bemporad used Pascoli's *Poemi Conviviali* as a stylistic collection from where she derived stylistic solutions (*Il discorso critico sulla B. acquista un'efficacia euristica ben maggiore appuntandosi sui Poemi Conviviali, considerati in primo luogo nella loro urgenza di copioso serbatoio stilematico*). Third, Perugi summarized Pascoli's impact on Bemporad's modes of constructing the verse. Specifically, the solutions stressed by Perugi are as follows: the prolongation of rhythm beyond the end of the metrical unit (*la tecnica del verso conclusivo, dove il periodo metrico si ferma e si prolunga in una serie plurima di echi timbrici*); the stress on the penultimate syllable through the use of word *proparossitone* in hiatus (*Ha imparato a sensibilizzare la penultima sede mediante latinismi proparossitoni, con le ultime due vocali in iato*); and lastly the triggers on vowels in hiatus (*ha imparato a sollecitare le aperture vocaliche in iato, preferibilmente giocando sul timbro cuspidale*). However, once these debts are identified, Perugi claimed Bemporad's substantial *anti-pascolismo* in her translation of the *Odyssey*. According to Perugi, Bemporad attempted to dismantle the pascolian hendecasyllable from within (*erosione interna che deflagra l'ombrosa sensibilità dell'endecasillabo pascoliano*) so as to create a prosaic version of the hendecasyllable (*prosa endecasillabica*) by using a number of solutions such as the refusal to use assonances and rhymes, just to mention the most evident ones. Valentina Russi, *Esercizi di assoluto. La poesia di Giovanna Bempoard* in «Esperienze letterarie», 3, XXXVI, (2011), 70-81, touching on Perugi's claim of Pascoli's influence on Bemporad's work, traced the prosodical solutions highlighted by Perugi (namely the stress on the penultimate syllable through the use of words *proparossitone* in hiatus) in the *Esercizi* as well, especially in the poem *Epilogo*, thus insisting on the continuity between Bemporad's poetic translations and her original poetry. Furthermore, Russi traced the echo of Pascoli's legacy in Bemporad's enactment of the poetic experience as the repetition of an emotional/psychic condition. As further evidence of Pascoli's traces in Bemporad's poetic imagination, Russi quoted the presence of the *assiuolo* and the *viola* in the poem *Madrigale*, and that of the *asfodeli* in *Euridice* as elements of funereal symbology.

¹² On Bemporad's use of the hendecasyllable in her translation of the *Odyssey* see Rodighiero, *L'Odisea di Giovanna Bemporad*.

¹³ The complete transcription of Sophocles' *Electra* translated by Giovanna Bemporad is included in the appendix.

Esercizi, Diari, is full of thematic references to *Electra*. My comparative study of this section of the *Esercizi* and of her version of Sophocles will shed light on structural aspects of Bemporad's poetics as a whole. Her interpretation of the Greek heroine inspired a reflection on her poetic quest and provided a model for her poetic Self. As we shall see in the course of this chapter, Electra's condition and her quest became an allegory for Bemporad's own poetic condition and her own poetic journey. This appropriation remained fundamental and informed Bemporad's poetic universe as a whole.

1.1 “Cara Giovanna, ritorniamo all’antico”. Thoughts on the translation of Greek tragedy in Carlo Izzo’s letters to Giovanna Bemporad

A recently published collection of Carlo Izzo's letters to Bemporad (covering the years 1940-1943) offers precious insight into Bemporad's life in the months when she was translating Greek tragedies.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the book features only Carlo Izzo's letters to Bemporad. It is unknown if Bemporad ever retrieved the letters she wrote to Izzo from his family or not. The editors, in the prefatory note, do not seem to question the status of these documents.¹⁵ Out of an entire corpus of 104 letters written by Izzo, the first eleven are missing. Bemporad did not send the first eleven letters of this ‘epistolary novel’, as the editors call it, saying that she had lost them. This loss, whether temporary (the letters being buried in

¹⁴ Paola Magi; Vincenzo, Pezzella, eds., *Carlo Izzo. Lettere a Giovanna Bemporad 1940 – 1943*, (Milan: Archivio Dedalus Edizioni, 2013). A letter dated Venice, 11th of April 1941, informs us that Viserba is the place where the two friends met for the first time, p. 71: ‘Ricordati che da quando ti conobbi a Viserba ad oggi io sono rimasto sempre allo stesso punto: amico ammirato e senza albagie.’

¹⁵ In the prefatory note the editors Magi and Pezzella tell us that Bemporad submitted the original letters from Carlo Izzo (already numbered and organized in chronological order). The editors take the fact that we have only Izzo's letters as a given condition. Bemporad herself in the video protrait edited by Pezzella, *A una forma sorella*, p. 17, mentions these letters: ‘Però sarebbero da pubblicare [i.e. le lettere], e io qualche volta ne ho parlato con un figlio di Izzo, e proprio perchè gli avevo dato probabilmente, o mi doveva restituire le lettere di Izzo, allora gli ho dato un appuntamento addirittura una sera con la moglie, e dato che anche lui amava l’Opera, all’Opera, quello è stato il nostro unico incontro. E, naturalmente, ne abbiamo parlato di questa eventuale pubblicazione, lui pensava che sarebbe stato giusto, perchè di suo padre, in fondo non esiste, tranne questa antologia, non esiste granchè...’. Maria Pia De Angelis; Guido Fink, “*Ecco un libro da scrivere*”: *Lettere di Carlo Izzo a Giovanna Bemporad* in Magi; Pezzella, pp. 8-11, acknowledge the fact that Bemporad's are missing: ‘Se le lettere di lei, che non possediamo, rivelano a quanto pare una sorta di “automatismo epistolare” e una certa tendenza all’autodenigrazione (frutto forse di orgoglio, insieme a una comprensibile paura)’.

Bemporad's enormous archive) or definitive, is particularly unfortunate considering the purpose of this research. At present we have four letters dating back to 1940 and covering the period from the 2nd May 1940 to the 1st July 1940. Notwithstanding this loss, the entire corpus is a crucial source for our understanding of Bemporad's poetic beginnings and the ways in which her engagement with Greek tragedy influenced her in the early stage of her poetic career.

Here is a letter dated 24th of June 1940:

Mandami pure qualche frutto dei tuoi troppo notturni sudori; mi farà sempre piacere; sebbene più me ne farebbe di sapere che nascono non di lunare tormento ma di solare sanità, i tuoi frutti canori. [...] Sto rileggendo Platone. Non nel testo purtroppo. Mentre il mondo mi sta crollando intorno – sai nulla tu della guerra? Del mondo che si sfascia e si rinnova? – io mi rifugio nella divina serenità, nella immutata serenità di Platone. Nella tua penultima hai trascritto: “e quando in cielo rosseggiò l’aurora e si spensero i lumi delle stelle, scorgemmo di lontano i colli oscuri, l’umile Italia. E primo “Italia” grida Acatae, Italia la salutano festosi i miei compagni...” troverai da te un errore metrico che è certamente un errore di copiatura. E quei tre versi che mi citi nell’ultima sono del tuo “Edipo re”? o di dove? Me li potresti ritrascrivere? Io leggo: “servo d’un altro – d’un uomo privo di beni”, ma non sono certo e poi: “la tomba dei morti”? O Sbaglio? Non fare troppa stima del tuo corrispondente, mi raccomando!¹⁶

The letter starts with Izzo's expressing his concern about Bemporad's habit of working at night. This is followed by a brief reference to Izzo's readings (Plato as a *refugium animae* while the war was raging in Europe). The final part of the letter tells us of an interesting practice of Bemporad and Izzo – a practice confirmed by the rest of the letters – namely their mutual exchange of translations. In this case, Izzo cites Bemporad's translation of *Aeneid* III, 520-524. This excerpt is truly precious as it can be considered as an early variant of the lines which appear fairly different in Bemporad's anthology of epics (1965), the first place where these excerpts were first published. Let us compare the three different versions:

¹⁶ Magi; Pezzella, p. 18.

Carlo Izzo's letter ¹⁷	1965 edition ¹⁸	1983 edition ¹⁹
e quando in cielo rossegiò l'aurora/ e si spensero i lumi delle stelle,/scorgemmo di lontano i colli oscuri, l'umile Italia. E primo "Italia" grida/ Acatae, Italia la salutano festosi / i miei compagni...	Poi quando in cielo rossegiò l'Aurora, / e si spensero i lumi delle stelle, / vedemmo di lontano i colli oscuri, /l'umile Italia. Acate: "Italia!" grida / salutano con liete grida "Italia!"/ i miei compagni. [...]	Già la nascente Aurora, messe in fuga le stelle, /rossegiava, quando oscuri / lontano i colli spuntano e a fior d'acqua / l'Italia. «Italia!» urla a gran voce Acate/ per primo, «Italia» salutando gridano/ lieti i compagni. [...]

Apart from offering an early version of a passage from Bemporad's *Aeneid*, the letter quotes her translation of 'Edipo re'. Unfortunately no trace of this tragedy has yet been found in Bemporad's personal archive. And this is just the first of a series of references to translations of Greek tragedies which have not been found yet.²⁰ The reference to the 'errore metrico' introduces a recurrent theme in these letters.²¹ Metrical and prosodic rules are often subject of discussion in Izzo's and Bemporad's correspondence, which testifies to their attention to rhythmic aspects. Izzo's keen interest in metrics emerges from another letter dated Venice, 1st of July 1940. Izzo begins the letter by venting once again his disapproval of Bemporad's anti-conformist behaviour. Having advised his young pupil to

¹⁷ Magi; Pezzella, p. 18.

¹⁸ Lorenzo Braccesi ed., *Gli eroi: antologia dell'epica per la scuola media*, con le nuovissime traduzioni dai poemi classici di Giovanna Bemporad (Bologna: Edizioni scolastiche Patron, 1965), p. 267.

¹⁹ Virgilio, *Dall'Eneide*, Giovanna Bemporad, introduzione di Luca Canali (Milano: Rusconi, 1983), p. 63. Virgilio, *Dall'Eneide*, Giovanna Bemporad, introduzione di Luca Canali (Roma: Forcom, 2000), reproduces the 1983 edition.

²⁰ Thus, it would seem that the number of Greek tragedies translated by Bemporad is even larger: I found 8 manuscripts in Bemporad's archive, and 3 more tragedies are referenced in the letters, for a total number of 11 tragedies.

²¹ The "errore metrico" to which Izzo refers probably concerns the word "Acatae". Bemporad's translation is in hendecasyllables, but in order to respect the metrical framework either "Acatae" has to belong to the following verse or "salutano" must be considered hypermetric.

try to have a more ‘normal’ life, Izzo turns his attention to Bemporad’s metrical experiments:

Naturalmente che tu ti esprimi in endecasillabi. Ma supponevo che le tue recenti esercitazioni in esametri latini ti avessero indotta a tentare un esperimento ‘barbaro’. Quanto ai branetti dal greco mi sembra, francamente, non valgono le traduzioni dal latino; i brani stessi delle *Georgiche* mi sembrano assai migliori. Forse non sei ancora matura per la suprema semplicità dei greci. Abbi pazienza: e non dimenticare che le culture intensive danno frutti insapori. Tempo al tempo, Giovanna, tempo al tempo. [...] Ti prometto solennissimamente che riprenderò a trascrivere e commentare i tuoi versi appena saprò che hai normalizzato la tua vita entro limiti compatibili con le necessità del tuo corpo, con le esigenze del mondo pratico e, soprattutto, con la sanità della tua mente, preziosamente dotata, se non vorrai bruciarla malamente in un falò insensato.²²

Here, the first line ‘naturalmente che tu ti esprimi in endecasillabi’ alludes to Bemporad’s metrics for her own poetry, and it echoes Ungaretti’s ideas on the hendecasyllable as the most ‘natural’ verse for Italian poets.²³ The recent *esercitazioni* in Latin hexameters must be linked to the mention of Virgil’s *Georgics* that immediately follows. *Un esperimento barbaro* probably recalls Giosuè Carducci’s *metrica barbara*;²⁴ Izzo seems to be saying that, despite her faithfulness to the hendecasyllable, Bemporad experimented with other measures. The reference to ‘i branetti dal greco’ introduces some difficulties. It is unlikely that Izzo is alluding to her translations of Greek tragedy. As we have seen in the letter in which *Edipo re* is mentioned, Izzo refers to Bemporad’s translation of a tragedy by citing its

²² Magi; Pezzella, p. 21. Prosodical comments are found in a letter dated 8th of October 1941, p. 90, when Izzo comments on Bemporad’s original poetry: ‘e il bruco uccidi/ e il fiore che di te respira cali/ insaziata nel mare (perchè la dieresi? O non vuoi fare un settenario?)’. Another time, in a letter dated 5th of November 1941, p. 105, Izzo discusses Bemporad’s translation of Byron’s *Childe Harold*: ‘Ho fatto una sola correzione: “potenza” invece di “violenza” per via della dieresi: meglio starci attenti: anche Praz ci tiene, e Dazzi, come sai, e Traverso, come strasai. Quando si può è certo meglio evitare: ho guardato qualche trattato teorico: soprattutto quando una ‘u’ è seguita da una consonante accentata (p. es. Persüaso) la regola è rigidissima. Quanto al primo settenario sdruciolato nel martelliano ti dirò che non solo è ammesso ma anzi è preferito, in quanto il martelliano non sarebbe che un tetrametro giambico catalettico’.

²³ Ungaretti, *Difesa dell’endecasillabo*, p. 154: “E l’ha nel sangue [i.e. l’endecasillabo] ogni vero poeta italiano. È l’ordine poetico naturale delle parole italiane”.

²⁴ Izzo is probably referring to Giosuè Carducci’s *Odi barbare* (1877). With his *metrica barbara* (expression created by Carducci himself) Carducci aimed at reproducing the quantitative aspect of Latin language into Italian poetry. On Carducci’s *metrica barbara*: Luigi Conte Falcone, *Metrica classica e metrica barbara. L’esametro latino e il verso sillabico italiano. Due saggi critici* (Vienna: Vienna&c, 1855); Massimiliano Mancini, *Saggi sulla poesia barbara e altri studi di metrica italiana* (Rome: Manziiana Vecchiarelli, 2000); Carlo Caruso, *Metri barbari e verso libero* in Carlo Caruso; Juan Rigoli, *Poétiques barbares. Poetiche barbare* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), pp. 209-230.

full title. Further evidence of this practice is found in two other letters, where Izzo asks Bemporad about her *Antigone*:

Mandami quanto prometti, e molta roba, scritta più chiaramente che puoi. Copierai l'Eneide? Vorrei tanto leggerla tutta, e, scritta chiaramente, l'Antigone?²⁵

The letter, dated 12th of January 1941, tells us that Bemporad had probably translated Sophocles' *Antigone*, of which no trace has yet been found in her personal archive. The *Antigone* is cited again in another letter, dated 29th of January 1941:

L'Antigone: trovo fiacche le battute iniziali: "E dunque ucciderai – e l'una e l'altra"? "No; tu dici bene..." etc. Forse hai anche copiato male un verso che non mi pare torni: "l'altra no perchè non ha sepolto". (Appunto a lato: forse manca un "ma") Correggi, o rettifica. Appena puoi spaziare di più, prosegui invece benissimo e i cori sono stupendi: "verdeggianti di grappoli in rigoglio" è uno dei tuoi bei versi, voglio dire di quelli che io amo di più: tuoi. Anche: "un germoglio di pietra come foglia". Ed è quanto mai evocativo il tono delle narrazioni: "Ho udito raccontare etc." "Anche la bella Danae sofferse..." Sei ricca a milioni: bada solo di non spenderli con troppo sfarzo, alla D'Annunzio, ma non mi sembra che tu corra quel pericolo: anzi, la cosa che più mi piace in te è la sobrietà: non tradirla mai.²⁶

From this description we might infer that Bemporad sent to Izzo long excerpts of her *Antigone*, if not the entire text. According to Izzo's comment, Bemporad achieves the best results when she translates following her own music (*è uno dei tuoi bei versi, voglio dire di quelli che io amo di più: tuoi*). The line quoted by Izzo is from the fifth chorus song (ll. 1130-5):

καί σε Νυσαίων ὄρέων
κισήρεις ὄχθαι χλωρά τ' ἄκτὰ
πολυστάφυλος πέμπει,
ἀμβρότων ἐπέων
εὐαζόντων Θηβαΐας ἐπισκοποῦντ' ἀγυιάς

The ivy-mantled slopes of Nysa's hills and the shore green with many-clustered vines send you, when accompanied by the cries of your divine words, you visit the avenues of Thebes.²⁷

²⁵ Magi; Pezzella, p. 26.

²⁶ Magi; Pezzella, p. 37.

²⁷ R.C. Jebb; P.E. Easterling; R. Blondell, *Sophocles: plays. Antigone* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004).

The line quoted (*verdeggianti di grappoli in rigoglio*) is a perfect hendecasyllable, in which a musical effect is achieved through the alliteration of the guttural sound (g) (in the original Greek we had the alliteration of the letter π). The line shows a tendency to stretch the verse beyond the syllabic constraints thanks to a repetitive rhythm. Such a rhythm is created by the insertion of similar prepositions (*di; in*) after long and resonant words. These pauses freeze the verse in minuscule suspenses thus enlarging the rhythmical unit of the line. Izzo appreciates the evocative tone of the narrative sections, and again quotes the beginnings of two verses: “Ho udito raccontare etc.” and “Anche la bella Danae sofferse...”. The finest quality the teacher seems to appreciate in his pupil’s work is sobriety (*la cosa che più mi piace in te è la sobrietà: non tradirla mai*) and her poetic engagement (*è uno dei tuoi bei versi, voglio dire di quelli che io amo di più: tuoi*). The translation of *Antigone* is mentioned again in another letter dated Venice, 13th of May 1941:

Ho dimenticato l’Antigone [*sic*], e se ne faccio più che in fretta tu mi pensi di sicuro a un pietoso silenzio. Come se io fossi capace di pietosi silenzi! Dunque: il principio, tutto quello che mi trascrivi, intendo, mi sembra bellissimo: ci sono versi fra i tuoi più belli. Copia pure tranquillamente.²⁸

The passage reinstates Izzo’s admiration for Bemporad’s ability to express her poetic voice at her best when translating Greek tragedy, with specific reference to Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Bemporad’s interest in Sophocles emerges in two other letters which refer to Bemporad translating at least one more tragedy:

Il coro dell’Edipo a Colono è forse anche più bello [i.e. del Macbeth], ma la tua voce, come, in tutt’altro senso, la mia è sempre la stessa: più melodiosa quando traduci dai classici, più aspra quando da Shakespeare: ma così dev’essere. Credo – vuoi fare l’esperimento – che se tu mi mandassi dieci brani di traduzione da qualsiasi lingua in italiano, e tra quelli uno soltanto tuo, lo scoperei fuori con assoluta sicurezza alla seconda lettura: non credo io possa farti lode migliore, nè più sincera.²⁹

²⁸ Magi; Pezzella, p. 80. The translation of the *Antigone* is mentioned again in another letter dated Venice 24th of October 1941 where Izzo encourages Bemporad to send her translation to Manlio Torquato Dazzi, p. 97: ‘Certo che dovrai mandare a Dazzi il Macbeth e l’Antigone: Dazzi è sincerissimamente ammirato di te.’; and again at p. 104: ‘Dazzi mi ha scritto: che aspetta da te il Macbeth [*sic*] e l’Antigone [*sic*] come d’accordo.’

²⁹ Magi; Pezzella, p. 62.

As this passage suggests, Izzo thinks that Bemporad varies her voice as a translator according to the nature of the original. The voice is *più melodiosa* when translating from the Classics, specifically from Greek tragedy, and *più aspra* when translating of modern tragedy (Shakespeare). Moreover, Izzo tells us that Bemporad is already in command of her own poetic voice when translating, a voice that he would recognise among many others.

Another interesting remark on Bemporad's distinctive style as a translator is found again in a letter dated Venice 3rd of April 1941:

E c'è musica, e musica tua, nei brani di Euripide. I tuoi commenti al solito catastrofici e piagnoni, sono assolutamente ingiustificati: come un riccone che passasse la vita a meditare sulla inenarrabile tristezza di non essere anche più ricco. Ma via! Ti prendo un po' in giro? Un po' forse, ma è la primavera a mettermi di buon umore. Scusami.³⁰

Moreover, we should mention a letter dated Venice 23rd of January 1942, where Izzo mentions Bemporad's attempted translations of *Medea*:

Per la Medea, invece, andiamo male. Ho guardato tra i tuoi scritti, ho guardato una per una anche le tue centotrentasei lettere: niente. Ho il principio, ma non quel punto lì in endecasillabi; lo ho nella seconda stesura in versi rotti. Credo che tu non me l'abbia restituito, quel pezzo, dopo che te lo detti per rivederlo. È possibile?³¹

Here Izzo offers a precious detail regarding the number of letters written by Bemporad (136), a crucial piece of information that, as mentioned before, was always left unclear by the editors of the correspondence. In addition to this, Izzo mentions two different poetic translations of Euripides' *Medea*. The first version seems to be in hendecasyllables (*quel punto lì in endecasillabi*) and the other in *versi rotti*, perhaps referring to shorter verses.³²

³⁰ Magi; Pezzella, p. 66.

³¹ Magi; Pezzella, pp. 121-2.

³² Pietro Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua* in Carlo Dionisotti, ed., *Pietro Bembo, Prose e rime* (Turin: Unione Tipografica-Editrice, 1966), I, 9, p. 93, describes the *verso rotto* as: 'Oltra che ritrovamento provenzale è stato lo usare i versi rotti; la quale usanza, perciò che molto varia in quelli poeti fu, che alcuna volta di tre sillabe li fecero, alcuna volta di quattro e ora di cinque e d'otto e molto spesso di nove, oltra quelle di sette e d'undici, avvenne che i più antichi Toscani più maniere di versi rotti usarono ne' loro poemi ancora essi, che loro più vicini erano e più nuovi nella imitazione, e meno i meno antichi; i quali da questa usanza si discostarono, secondo che egli si vennero da loro lontanando, in tanto che il Petrarca verso rotto niuno altro che di sette sillabe non fece'. Dionisotti in the footnote at the passage explains: 'Il Bembo chiama *versi rotti* qui e nel II libro i versi di misura inferiore all'endecasillabo (decasillabo provenzale). Naturalmente l'uso di tali versi non

This is an important remark confirming Bemporad's attentiveness to metrical experimentation in her poetic versions of Greek tragedy.

This corpus of letters is precious for two reasons. It records Bemporad's evolution from her prodigiously early beginnings as a translator and *enfant prodige* to a stage where, thanks to Izzo and to her obstinate stamina, she obtained recognition from such critics as Leone Traverso, Mario Praz and Vincenzo Errante who are very present in these letters and provide contacts with publishing houses. The letters describe the struggle of a young poet seeking accomplishment through the activity of poetic translations, fully aware of the fact that writing poetry and translating poetry are two paths that often meet. Bemporad's activity appeared to be constantly threatened by her fragile mental and physical state (reclusion in *case di salute* is frequently referred to in her letters) and by her uneasy personality that would often expose her to public shame (as Izzo repeats multiple times).³³ The historical period that witnessed the birth of these letters is a difficult one, especially considering Bemporad's Jewish origins. Hence the letters where Izzo invites her to think of a different nom de plume (Giovanna della Bianca and Giovanna Bembo).³⁴ However, the letters contain few direct references to the events that marked the historical period. Worries about the *hic et nunc* of Italy, and Europe, the outbreak of war, the deteriorating living conditions are barely acknowledged, if we exclude the very few passages where Izzo mentions the cold and the lack of paper. The focus is on literature, poetic translation, metrics, the two friends' numerous literary projects, the literary network they were part of, and their hope for the future, which is by all means a future of more poetry.

può dirsi *ritrovamento provenzale*, ma il Bembo ha ragione notando il favore che tali versi ebbero nella poesia provenzale e in quella provenzaleggiante italiana.'

³³ Izzo constantly invites Bemporad to embrace a more regular lifestyle so to avoid public shame. An example of Izzo's concerns on this matter is offered by a letter dated Venice, 1st of July 1940 in Magi; Pezzella, p. 20: 'Mi si scrive che tu vai in giro per Bologna così male in arnese, che è inevitabile l'attenzione degli oziosi si soffermi su di te. E, ti dirò, anche qui a Venezia, ho sorpreso più d'uno sguardo incuriosito e, francamente anche qualche risolino. So che l'ironia ti infastidisce e per questo ti metto in guardia. Perchè permettere all'originalità del tuo spirito di trapelare all'esterno in modo da renderti la favola della città?'

³⁴ Magi; Pezzella, p. 120.

In addition to this, the letters testify to the variety of authors translated by Bemporad in the years 1940-1943, mentioning translation projects that eventually led to publications, such as the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad*, but also an incredible amount of other translations, which remain so far unexplored and unpublished.³⁵ The reference to other three Greek tragedies translated by Bemporad (*Antigone*, *Edipo re* and *Edipo a Colono*) means that more translations are to be added to the group of eight manuscripts of tragedies which I recently found in Bemporad's archive. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate in the archive the tragedies referenced in the collection of letters (with the sole exception of *Medea*) and the ones I found in the archive are not mentioned in the letters.

The letters offer further evidence of Bemporad's interest in Greek tragedy paired with her metrical investigation of the hendecasyllable. Nothing prevents us from imagining that she might have translated even more than what we have found to this point.

2. "Quella smania violentissima di comporre": Bemporad's translations and poetic inspiration

"Ma non credetti d'esser poeta, se non dopo letti parecchi poeti greci"

G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone 1741*

The letters which I have briefly examined reveal the *long durée* of some of Bemporad's most famous projects, such as the translation of the *Aeneid*, and brought to the fore a number of previously unknown projects. Together with the archival findings (the manuscripts) these documents contribute to the mapping of Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedy as a whole. The number of tragedies translated (eleven in total: eight manuscripts and three tragedies referenced in the letters), the fact that these translations

³⁵ Vergil's *Georgics* are mentioned at p. 21, and *Bucolics* are mentioned at p. 136. G. G. Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* at p. 83, 86, 87, 91, 94, 137, 153, 155. W. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at p. 17, 37, 74, 76, 97, 104. J. W. Goethe's *Faust*, at p. 150, 151. A translation of Plato is referenced in a letter dated 31st of October 1941, p. 103: 'Anche Platone ora? Ma prenditi tempo'.

are complete (as opposed to an anthology of selected passages which is how Bemporad will work in later years), the creative energy devoted to this undertaking (roughly five/ten days for each tragedy), and the remarks written by the author at the end of each text are critical data for understanding Bemporad's overall scope. The reasons behind such a passionate commitment are interconnected with the issue of poetic inspiration, an overarching presence and an object of research in Bemporad's poetic practice. Poetic inspiration and poetic translation are inextricably linked in her thought. Poetic translation is the only activity during which the poet can open herself to inspiration and create poetry.³⁶ It is worth mentioning that Bemporad compared inspiration to a devotional call, fulfilling a cogent necessity experienced from within:

Io non ho paura di usare la parola "ispirazione" per chi si sente chiamato a scrivere da un'invincibile necessità, come per vivere bisogna respirare. Scrivere – diceva Rilke – è come respirare attraverso la penna. E io aggiungerei che se esiste una "santità" laica, il poeta dovrebbe a pieno titolo esservi iscritto. È quasi un luogo comune che la vita o la si vive o la si scrive, e io posso ben dire che è stata la letteratura nel bene come nel male, nel giusto come nell'ingiusto, a condurre per mano la mia vita, e non viceversa. Dunque, poeti prima si nasce e poi si diventa.³⁷

Yet, to understand what is at stake when we consider the issue of inspiration, beyond Bemporad's personal mythology and why her translations of Greek tragedy are particularly relevant to this issue, we need to read these texts bearing in mind Leopardi's crucial influence on her work. Bemporad's poetic engagement with Greek tragedy is indebted to Leopardi's considerations on the poetic function of translation from the Greek and the inspiration derived from this practice.

Bemporad internalised the lesson of a poet who pursued his own poetic education through translation of the Classics. Leopardi, in the so called 'periodo filologico', devoted

³⁶ In a letter dated 18th of January 1941, Izzo encourages Bemporad to translate in order to foster her poetic voice, p. 33: 'So che tu sei più che una promessa. Ma, non conoscendo i tuoi versi originali, voglio prima vedere se sono all'altezza delle traduzioni. Ove non lo siano: traduci e aspetta che il tuo mondo fantastico sia all'altezza delle tue possibilità espressive.'

³⁷ From a manuscript sheet contained in a miscellaneous folder labeled in the author's handwriting as *Miei scritti sulla questione del tradurre*.

his time to the study of ancient literature and translation from classical languages. Franco D'Intino, in his introduction to the volume *Giacomo Leopardi. Poeti greci e latini* has stressed the importance that the translations from Greek (1814-1817 and 1823-1834) had in Leopardi's poetic creation.³⁸ Citing a letter which Leopardi wrote to Pietro Giordani, D'Intino shows how Leopardi identified the poetic function of translation from the Classics. He understood it to be a tremendously enriching activity: the mind, after an initial shock, became capable of receiving the creative energy generated in the process of reading Greek poetry. D'Intino observes that for Leopardi translating Greek poetry was a shocking experience:

Non si tratta dunque di uno scolastico esercizio; e non è da sottovalutare la forza profonda del *tumulto* e della *confusione* che mette a soqquadro la giovane mente del lettore. È un impatto che potrebbe essere descritto, in termini freudiani, come *unheimlich*: l'apparizione di qualcosa di familiare che ritorna in forme estranee e perciò terrorizzanti. Questo qualcosa è il mondo classico, e più precisamente il mondo greco.³⁹

The perceived otherness of the ancient Greek, as a perturbing experience then created a long standing, yet fruitful, paradox in his poetics: for Leopardi the impossibility to translate literally and faithfully leads to the 'recreation of the Ancient voice' starting with the recreation (or discovery) of one's own voice. Thus, in order to establish a relationship with Greek poetry, one has to achieve that 'strato profondo e naturale che accomuna al di qua del linguaggio, il poeta antico e quello moderno'.⁴⁰

It would be fair to say that these assumptions underpin Bemporad's poetic translation of Greek tragedy, which can be regarded as a kind of poetic apprenticeship.

³⁸ Franco D'Intino, *Giacomo Leopardi. Poeti greci e latini* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1999), pp. VII-LXIII. On the importance of these translations in Leopardi's creative process see also F. De Sanctis, *Leopardi*, ed. by Carlo Muscetta and Antonia Perna, (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), p.18. S. Timpanaro, *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1977), pp. 171-199; F. Figurelli, *La formazione del Leopardi sino al 1819. Lezioni dell'anno accademico 1970-71*, (Naples: De Simone, 1971), p.37.

³⁹ D'Intino, XII.

⁴⁰ D'Intino, XXIII: 'Ma giacchè non è possibile, traducendo, riprodurre *fedelmente*, è meglio allora inventare Anacreonte, ricreando a partire da sè, da quello strato profondo e *naturale* che accomuna, al di qua del linguaggio, il poeta antico a quello moderno'.

Bemporad's translation of Sophocles's *Electra* shows how she eschewed a more literal translation, seeking instead her own poetic voice. She attempted to dialogue with Sophocles' poetry through the interrogation of her own voice and her personal metrical and rhythmical research. In the *Electra* Bemporad is a 'poet-artisan' who tries to modulate her poetic voice by her close reading of Sophocles' poetry. Moreover, Leopardi's belief in the impossibility of a faithful translation and the need for the recreation of the Greek text via the creation of one's own poetic voice exerted its influence on Bemporad's theoretical ideas on translation.⁴¹ Bemporad believed that poetry was untranslatable.⁴² Notwithstanding this deep conviction, she made poetic translation the core of her literary activity. Yves Bonnefoy's essay *Le paradoxe du traducteur* helps us to understand the creative potential of this contradiction:

[...] ce témoin d'un autre poète serait incité à en devenir un et puissamment aidé à y parvenir, les difficultés de sa tâche ne pouvant que l'ancrer toujours plus dans ce projet. Un paradoxe? Le paradoxe du traducteur? Ce qui rend impossible la traduction de la poésie, c'est cela même qui suscite ou enforce en son traducteur qui en souffre une vocation de poète. Et la compensation, la voici. Le traducteur apprend à s'aventurer au profond de soi; ou, s'il fuit déjà, comprend qu'il a le pouvoir de le faire encore plus.⁴³

The impossibility of translation awakens the poet to his or her poetic vocation encouraging them to venture into the depths of their own poetic awareness. It is interesting to note that the sentence 'Le traducteur apprend à s'aventurer au profond de soi' appears to echo Leopardi's quest for that 'strato profondo e naturale che accomuna al di qua del linguaggio, il poeta antico e quello moderno', in D'Intino's words.

The creative effects of the paradox in question are directly connected with the issue

⁴¹ Bemporad discusses the importance of having 'un temperamento poetico personale' to produce a good translation in her essay *La traduzione dell'Odisea* in Buffoni, *La traduzione del testo poetico*, pp. 240-1. Similarly, Bemporad discusses her ideas on translation in the essay *Come tradurre Omero*, in «Resine. Quaderni Liguri di Cultura» (Genova: Marco Sabatelli Editore), 2005, pp. 13-16.

⁴² Bemporad herself confirmed this belief during a telephone call with me on the 24th of December 2012. The idea is also reinstated in a manuscript sheet contained in a miscellaneous folder labelled in the author's handwriting as *Miei scritti sulla questione del tradurre* now held at the *Centro Apice*.

⁴³ Yves Bonnefoy, *Le paradoxe du traducteur* in *L'autre langue à portée de voix* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2013), p. 81.

of poetic inspiration. Bonnefoy, in his collection of essays *L'autre langue à portée de voix*, offers an insightful perspective on this problem:

Pourquoi une traduction ne pourrait-elle pas faire fleurir l'écrit qu'elle sollicite, en effet, fleur restée parfois en bouton? Sans trahir davantage que le rosier porté d'un sol à un autre n'est trahi pas ses roses alors quelquefois plus belles? La traduction de la poésie a pouvoir d'être un dialogue, mais même aussi une collaboration. [...] En bref, si le traducteur est poète la traduction est possible, et ni plus ni moins difficile que la création poétique directement pratiquée.⁴⁴

In this passage we can see how Bonnefoy overcomes the logical paradox pertaining to the differences between languages. If the translator is a poet, Bonnefoy suggests that one must understand that the activity of poetic translation is as complex as that of creating poetry. In addition to this, Bonnefoy argues that the poet translator has the possibility to disclose hidden presences in the text. The poet who translates can develop the poetic text and make explicit poetic concepts that were silent in the original. Bonnefoy's blossoms metaphor helps to understand Bemporad's additions in her translation of the *Electra*. In fact, these additions are the results of the inspiration experienced in the process of poetic translation. They will be further developed in the opening section of the *Esercizi (Diari*, which belong to the same period of the translation of Greek tragedy) and, more broadly, they will inform Bemporad's thought as a whole.

Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedy are therefore one of the earliest examples of her search for the conditions in which her internal *motus* could meet the external world and become poetry thanks to the practice of poetic translation. In her discussion of the *Esercizi* Valentina Russi points out how this *motus* is reflected in the title itself. Through an etymological reading of the word *esercizio*, Russi suggests that rather than merely referring to stylistic exercises, the title of the book has a more profound meaning:

⁴⁴ Yves Bonnefoy, *Signification et poésie* in *L'autre langue à portée de voix*, p. 97.

Si tratta [i.e. 'l'esercizio'] di una transizione, di un passaggio da un dentro (le potenti e informi emozioni dell'io lirico) a un fuori («les mots»), di una vera e propria esecuzione dell'intimo. In questo senso il termine recupera decisamente l'originaria transitività: EX-ARCERE vale 'spingere qualcosa verso l'esterno', e il frequentativo EXERCITARE indica la ripetitività dell'azione, giustificando l'estensione semantica sino a 'operare', 'mettere in pratica', 'mettere alla prova'. La valenza riflessiva di "esercitar-si" non scompare, ma anzi viene potenziata dall'analogo transitivo: l'esercizio poetico di configurare come un agirsi, uno spingere fuori (dove il fuori è rappresentato dalle parole) una parte di sé.⁴⁵

Russi's interpretation stresses the importance of inspiration in this outward movement. The *Esercizi*, a book composed of poetic translations and original poetry, is the result of a poetic process experienced as the repetition of a transition. In the enactment of this process no difference is made between poetic translations and original poetry: in both cases Bemporad unearths and reunites with her poetic Self. In light of this, Russi's comment illuminates the binary structure of poetry and translation, which informs Bemporad's poetic discourse. A Leopardian echo in the poem *Paesaggio* sheds further light on the process of poetic creation:

L'immagine di un'acqua fresca e viva
domina la mia sete. Non più gaie
rincorse, non più giochi strepitosi
sotto altissimi cieli.

Ma sul greto
le donne ancora lavano le lenzuola
(e ne riflette i gesti l'acqua chiara
come uno specchio); con movenze liete
vanno ragazze a stenderle le tele.
Tutto fa ch'io torni come allora
quand'era dolce abbandonarsi al riso
con leggerezza estrema, e non la smania di
comporre l'ignoto in forma certa
l'ingenuità del cuore aveva offeso.⁴⁶

In a 2011 video-portrait, Bemporad, defined this poem a declaration of her poetics.⁴⁷ *Paesaggio*, which belongs to the section *Diari* (where the influence of Greek tragedy is most evident) describes the poetic process. The image of fresh and living water that quenches

⁴⁵ Russi, *Esercizi di assoluto*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Bemporad, *Paesaggio* in *Esercizi* (Milan: Garzanti, 1980), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Pezzella, *Video-ritratto*, p. 31.

thirst stands for the codification of material into a poetic form, where thirst metaphorically alludes to the physical necessity of writing. The flow of water and its dynamic vitality symbolise inspiration. However, water acts as a mirror in the second section of the poem, and reflects the movements of the joyful women. *Le donne che lavano le vesti* and *le ragazze che vanno a stenderle cantando* represent the transition from childhood to a more adult age which can still offer glee and joy. The journey of water is also a trip through memory. In the last part of the poem, one idea stands out, namely Bemporad's fear that her obsessive desire to make sense of the world through writing (*la smania di / comporre l'ignoto in forma certa*)⁴⁸ may ruin the innocence of the heart, taking away her childhood. Bemporad identifies the most important part of the poem in these very last lines:

Mi sono accorta che la parte finale dà uno spessore ai versi precedenti che sono più rievocativi di immagini dell'infanzia e più descrittivi, insomma, infatti, è intitolata *Paesaggio*.⁴⁹

Featuring the themes of memory, nostalgia for childhood and search for inspiration the poem is replete with Leopardian echoes. In particular, the very last line bears a striking similarity to the following passage from a letter written by Leopardi to Pietro Giordani (30 Aprile 1817):

Da che ho cominciato a conoscere un poco il bello, a me quel calore e quel desiderio ardentissimo di tradurre e far mio quello che leggo, non han dato altri che i poeti e quella smania violentissima di comporre, non altri che la natura e le passioni, ma in modo forte ed elevato, facendomi quasi ingigantire l'anima in tutte le sue parti, e dire fra me: questa è poesia, e p[er] esprimere quello che io sento ci voglion versi e non prosa, e darmi a far versi.⁵⁰

As D'Intino suggests, the letter belongs to the period when Leopardi believed that translating the Classics had to take precedence over writing poetry. At that point, Leopardi, now fully aware of his role as a poet-translator rather than a translator-poet, had already moved on to the translation of fragments that were functional to his poetic discourse. The

⁴⁸ Bemporad, *Paesaggio* in *Esercizi*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Pezzella, *Video-ritratto*, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Giacomo Leopardi, *Epistolario 1817*, p. 94.

intertextuality of this line confirms Leopardi's influence on Bemporad's poetic research and her understanding of the importance of inspiration as a driving force – at times violent – behind her poetics.

3. Translating Greek tragedy in Italian metrics: *Electra's* long hendecasyllables

Bemporad completed her translation of Sophocles' *Electra* in ten days, finishing on the 20th October 1940, as we can infer from the document. The manuscript of 66 sheets (consisting of 17 folios of four sheets, with text on recto and verso), shows the starting date on the top left margin of the recto side of the first sheet, '10 Ottobre 1940', and the end date, '20 Ottobre 1940', on the verso side of the first sheet of the last folio. It is hard to say with certainty where Bemporad was when she translated Sophocles' *Electra*, but we may put forward a plausible hypothesis. Of all the translations composing the 'tragic group' just two manuscripts give the place together with the date: Euripides' *Heracleidae* (26th of August 1940) and *Bacchae* (17th of September 1940). The place is Viserba, a small town (close to Rimini) on the Adriatic coast. Thanks to an interview conducted (and then edited) by Vincenzo Pezzella in 2011, we know that every summer Bemporad used to spend three months with her family in Viserba.⁵¹ Given that this group of translations belongs, as a whole, to the period from the 10th of July to the 21st of October (the start date of the *Libation Bearers* which is the last text of the group) we can cautiously assume that Bemporad translated these texts in the summer months spent in Viserba. The second option is

⁵¹ Pezzella, *Giovanna Bemporad. A una forma sorella. Intervista videoritratto*, p. 10: '[...] Elio Pagliarani (di poco più giovane, era il figlio del vetturino che, negli anni prima della guerra, dalla stazione ferroviaria accompagnava la famiglia Bemporad a Viserba, sulla costa adriatica, per gli abituali tre mesi estivi di villeggiatura – appassionato di numismatica, l'allora adolescente fu eletto da Giovanna a interlocutore e allievo di poesia).' Elio Pagliarani recollects his memories about Giovanna Bemporad (offering further confirmation of this friendship being born in Viserba) in an article titled 'Quando lei mi leggeva Montale' (Paese Sera, 4 Marzo, 1981) now in Giovanna Bemporad, *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi* (Milan: Archivio Dedalus Edizioni, 2010), pp. 207-208.

Bologna where she returned immediately after the end of the summer holidays that year.⁵² The *Elettra* manuscript is autograph, and so are the other manuscripts composing this group of translations. Bemporad's signature appears in full three times in this document. The first time it features above the title (SOFOCLE-ELETTRA, in capital letters). The second time it appears is on the top right margin beneath the sub-title 'traduzione di Bemporad Giovanna'. The third and last time it is at the very end of the manuscript, just beneath the end date and the line 'FINE-ELETTRA'. This last signature is at the foot of the text as a concluding element of Bemporad's personal note on the tragedy: 'Finito con furia distruggitrice d'ogni ostacolo. Senza fermarmi mai. Né mai mi fermerò! Finché avrò vita. È questa una tragedia divina. Bemporad Giovanna'. *Elettra's* concluding note is the longest of all the comments that accompany her translations. At the end of her *Medea* Bemporad complains that her pleasure was short-lived: 'Peccato sia finito così presto. Ma troverò da continuare. Divino poeta!'. *Iphigenia at Aulis* does not have any other comment other than the following very laconic statement of its end 'Fine della tragedia: Ifigenia in Aulide'. By contrast, the comment at the end of Bemporad's *Hippolytus* stresses the translator's joy: 'Continuerò. È gioia grande'. *Heracleidae* further restates Bemporad's desire to keep translating: 'Continuerò ancora'. *Bacchae* gives us an insight into Bemporad's sentimental state: 'Continuare a tradurre. È l'ultimo conforto che mi resta. Sono molto triste'. Aeschylus' *Libation bearers* and *Persians* are incomplete and therefore do not feature any concluding notes.

In the manuscript of Bemporad's *Elettra* there are no references to the edition she used. Nor does the manuscript mention dictionaries, commentaries or any other Italian translations. Bemporad's personal library and archive, which have been recently incorporated by the *Centro Apice* of the University of Milan, are in the process of being

⁵² The letters sent by Izzo to Bemporad in that period are all addressed to her house in Bologna thus confirming this hypothesis.

catalogued. Yet we can attempt to identify the most likely reference edition. The editions of Sophocles' *Electra*⁵³ available in 1940 were, in chronological order, are: C. G. Erfurdt and J. G. Hermann (Leipzig 1825, with commentary)⁵⁴, L. Campbell (Oxford 1881 with commentary)⁵⁵, R. C. Jebb (Cambridge 1894³, with commentary)⁵⁶ and A. C. Pearson (Oxford 1924, edition only).⁵⁷ We can easily establish which edition was at Bemporad's disposal when she translated Sophocles if, together with these critical editions we consider also the Italian translations of Sophocles' *Electra* available at the time.⁵⁸ A careful examination of these translations proves that the Italian translation used by Bemporad was the edition prepared by Enrico Turolla.⁵⁹ This is evident from the lexical borrowing and syntactical similarities. This edition (in the pocket-slender format of the series *Biblioteche di letteratura*) reproduces the text established by A. C. Pearson (1923 edition). My comparative analysis of Bemporad' translation and Turolla's version has proved the common dependence on the text established by A. C. Pearson.⁶⁰

The most evident difference between Bemporad's and Turolla's translation is that the former is in verse: Turolla opts for a version in prose, whereas Bemporad uses blank hendecasyllables. This difference reveals something about the trends in translation of

⁵³ For an in-depth study of Sophocles' textual tradition see G. Avezzi, *Text and transmission* in A. Markantonatos, *Brill's Companion to Sophocles* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). R. D. Dawe, *Studies on the text of Sophocles*, (Leiden: Brill), 1973-1978; F. Ferrari, *Ricerche sul testo di Sofocle* (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 1983); A. Turyn, *The Sophocles Recension of Manuel Moschopolous*, «TAPhA» 80, 1949, 94-153; A. Turyn, *Studies in the Manuscript tradition of the tragedies of Sophocles*, (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1952).

⁵⁴ Erfurdt, Carl Gottlob A.; Hermann, Johann Gottfried J., *Sophoclis tragoediae septem ac deperditarum fragmenta emendavit, varietatem lectionis, scholia notasque tum aliorum tum suas adjecit Carolus Gottlob Augustus Erfurdt. Accedit lexicon Sophocleum. (Cum adnotationibus G. Hermanni)*, Lips. 1822-25².

⁵⁵ L. Campbell, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, vol II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881).

⁵⁶ R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: Plays and fragments. Electra* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1894).

⁵⁷ A. C. Pearson, *Sophoclis Fabulae* (Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1923).

⁵⁸ U. Agatodemone, *Sofocle. L'Elettra* (Naples: L. Chiurazzi, 1909); L.A. Michelangeli, *Sofocle. L'Elettra* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1917); G. La Magna, *Sofocle. Elettra* (Ragusa: Stab. tib. popolare, 1923); Ettore Romagnoli, *Sofocle. Le tragedie*, 3 voll., III, (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1926); H. Montesi; N. Festa, *Sofocle. Elettra* (Rome: Ausonia, 1927); E. Bignone, *Le tragedie di Sofocle*, 3 voll., 3, (Florence: Sansoni, 1937-8); E. Turolla, *Sofocle. Elettra* (Milan: Signorelli, 1937).

⁵⁹ Enrico Turolla, *Elettra. Sofocle. Traduzione con note critiche e sceniche* (Milan: Carlo Signorelli, 1937). Turolla also wrote an essay on Sophocles: E. Turolla, *Saggio sulla poesia di Sofocle* (Bari: Laterza, 1934.)

⁶⁰ Turolla, at the foot of the introduction to his translation: 'Il testo originale donde è fatta la versione, è quello sostanzialmente del Pearson (Oxford 1923)', p. 8.

Greek tragedies in those years. Versified versions of Greek tragedy before and after the 40s do not appear to be common. Paolo Zoboli's bibliographical catalogue of Italian translations of Greek tragedy (covering the years 1900-1960) helps us to get an overall picture of the situation. From 1900 to 1940, only two translators, out of the total number of eight, decided to offer metrical renditions of Sophocles' *Electra*.⁶¹ Prose remains the prevalent choice after the year 1940:⁶² out of the total number of five translations of Sophocles' *Electra* produced in 1940-1960 none is metrical, if we exclude Salvatore Quasimodo's rhythmical version of *Electra*.⁶³ This background information helps to understand the novelty represented by Bemporad's hendecasyllabic *Electra*. It would not be exaggerated to say that her novelty is the result of a strong poetic agenda. This metrical version is part of a larger project aimed at inscribing her work into the established literary tradition. The choice of the hendecasyllable, the most canonical and versatile line in the Italian poetic tradition, is a poetics of sorts. As she states in her later essay *La traduzione dell'Odissea* (1989):

Usare l'endecasillabo non significa applicare la misura di un verso stereotipo eguale in chiunque lo adoperi. C'è l'endecasillabo di Dante e quello del Petrarca, l'endecasillabo di Foscolo e quello del Leopardi e poi via via quello di Ungaretti (di *Sentimento del tempo*) quello di Saba e perfino quello del primo Pasolini. Non è certo mai in nessun caso lo stesso endecasillabo: ognuno opera al suo interno una sua propria personale e inconfondibile invenzione.⁶⁴

This excerpt unravels Bemporad's ideas on metrics, translation and originality. First of all, it shows her very idiosyncratic view on metrics. Bemporad compares her 'homeric' hendecasyllables to those of other Italian poets. Interestingly, we find a 'personal' list of hendecasyllabic poets who might have worked as models or paradigms for her, at different stages of her poetic development. More particularly, this passage sheds crucial light on how

⁶¹ E. Bignone and G. La Magna are the two translators who offer translations in verses of Sophocles' *Electra*.

⁶² For this bibliographic research the catalogue (*regesto*) of translations of Greek tragedy published in 1900-1960 produced by P. Zoboli in appendix to his *Rinascita della tragedia*, pp. 179-202 has been an invaluable tool.

⁶³ Salvatore Quasimodo, *Sofocle. Elettra* (Milan: Mondadori, 1954).

⁶⁴ Giovanna Bemporad, *La traduzione dell'Odissea* in Franco Buffoni, *La traduzione del testo poetico* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1989), pp. 240-1.

she understands the complex relationship between poetic translation and original poetry. Bemporad claims that a poet's distinctive contribution lies in the personal use of the verse (*ognuno opera al suo interno una sua propria personale e inconfondibile invenzione*).⁶⁵ This is another pivotal point in our discussion of Bemporad's poetic discourse as a whole (poetic translation included). Further evidence of her metrical and rhythmical research in relation to translating is found in one of her writings on translation:

Ho cominciato a tradurre poesia quando ero appena una adolescente: i classici greci e latini soprattutto, ma anche Shakespeare, Goethe, Novalis, Hofmannsthal, Byron, Shelley, Keats. Poi i simbolisti francesi e i moderni lirici tedeschi (Holderlin, Rilke, George): una specie di lettura o di interpretazione a prima vista di qualunque testo letterario come fosse uno spartito musicale.⁶⁶

Here, Bemporad claims that her poetic translations of Greco-Roman literature were a pivotal experience of her adolescence. The comparison between a musical score (*spartito musicale*) and a text can be seen as further confirmation of her interest in rhythm. Moreover, this reference gives us insight into her guiding principle: translation is described as a special kind of interpretative reading inspired by the music (rhythm) of the text. Bemporad creates a parallel between words and musical notes thus stressing her view of poetry as music. Translation is the way through which she recreates the music of the text with her own words. *Elettra's* poetic version inaugurates her lifelong research on verse and metre. It will be the aim of this section to highlight Bemporad's distinctive mark (*personale invenzione*) and to examine the metrical innovations in her hendecasyllabic translation of Sophocles' *Elettra*.

⁶⁵ On the difference between metre and verse see Nicola Gardini, *Il metro e il verso in Com'è fatta una poesia* (Milan: Sironi, 2007), pp. 103-121.

⁶⁶ From an interview, typewritten and corrected by the author's handwriting kept in a miscellaneous folder, probably prepared for a possible publication. The title of the interview is *L'esercizio della scrittura come ascesi spirituale*. The quotation here is Bemporad's answer to the question 'Quando e perché hai affrontato la prima traduzione?' The material is now held at *Centro Apice* and it is in the process of being catalogued.

The first aspect to consider is the structural difference between Greek quantitative metrics and Italian metrics based on stressed syllables. This structural difference is preserved. Bemporad's metrical translation does not aim to reproduce the rhythmic units of Sophocles' tragedy. Instead, she attempts to create a rhythm of her own. This operation is carried out in conjunction with a careful appropriation of themes.

Sophocles' *Electra*, like other tragedies, employs a variety of metres and rhythms in compliance with the genre's structural divisions into lyrical and recited sections.⁶⁷ Bemporad respects these divisions (in the manuscript, we therefore read the classical labels of *parodos*, *stasimon*, *epeisodion*, just to mention the most important ones). However, in her translation, she does not change the metre in accordance with these differences. Her devotion to the hendecasyllable is total. Yet, to use the same metrical unit does not mean to reproduce the same rhythm over and over again. And it is specifically in this respect that we can see Bemporad's creative conception of metrics in action in her poetic version of the *Electra*. She tests the hendecasyllable prosodic possibilities using it as an expandable and variable verse.

The most evident innovation of Bemporad's use of the hendecasyllable is her attempt to expand the rhythmical length of the verse beyond its syllabic constraints, especially in the lyrical sections. This result is achieved thanks to an extensive use of vocalic syllables and to a strategic position within the verse, and to a considerable use of enjambment connecting the verses into a sort of endless 'waterfall' structure.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For an analysis of *Electra*'s lyric metres see J.H. Kells, ed., *Sophocles. Electra* (Cambridge University Press 1973), pp. 232-238.

⁶⁸ On the *colon* as a metrical unit of variable length see Bruno Gentili; Liana Lomiento, *Metrica e ritmica. Storia delle forme poetiche della Grecia antica* (Milan: Mondadori Università, 2003), pp. 7-8.

Bemporad's awareness of rhythmic units when translating from Greek poetry emerges also from the video-interview *A una forma sorella*, when discussing her translation of the *Odyssey*: 'E stavo anche su una frase d'Omero per dieci ore, capisci? Finché mi veniva la soluzione perfetta, di ogni frase d'Omero, ogni frase, perché, se anche il primo verso veniva, lo travasavo quasi senza difficoltà dal greco all'italiano, al mio endecasillabo, poi gli altri non venivano, non ci stavano dentro. E allora dovevo cambiare completamente l'inizio perché la frase doveva poi venire tutta completa, fino in fondo, fino al punto. Ogni frase cioè non un verso, ma tutta la frase. Questa è stata la grande fatica.', p. 40.

In the recited sections, especially in the dialogues, Bemporad “breaks” the hendecasyllable into two parts. This fracture is also reproduced graphically, and it is particularly used in the dialogues where the verse is divided between two different characters. This metrical experimentation always combines with Bemporad’s interpretative translation and selection of themes dear to her poetic sensibility. As we will see, thanks to this procedure Bemporad can dislocate thematic words into sensitive positions of the verse. The majority of changes in respect to the original are guided by her desire to expand or shorten the rhythmical units according to the reworking of specific cores of interest. To reach this goal, Bemporad employs a variety of solutions. The measures applied range from hyper-translations (additions) and hypo-translations (cuts) to the use of linguistic archaism alternated with change of register and borrowings from an oral use of language, change and/or respect of word order, the use of enjambement, and minor rewritings of certain passages. Bemporad employs all these strategies to shape her interpretation of the Greek heroine.

Hyper and hypo-translations, often appearing together with minor rewritings, are characteristic. Let us consider Electra’s *θρήνος* (ll. 86-120):

<p>Ἥλέκτρα ὦ φάος ἀγνὸν καὶ γῆς ἰσόμοιρ' ἀήρ, ὡς μοι πολλὰς μὲν θρήνων ὠδάς, πολλὰς δ' ἀντήρεις ἦσθου στέρνων πληγὰς αἰμασσομένων, ὅποταν δνοφερὰ νύξ ὑπολειφθῆ- τὰ δὲ παννυχίδων ἤδη στυγεραὶ ξυνίσασ' εὐναὶ μογερῶν οἴκων, ὅσα τὸν δύστηνον ἐμὸν θρηνώ πατέρ', ὃν κατὰ μὲν βάρβαρον αἶαν φοίνιος Ἄρης οὐκ ἐξένισεν, μήτηρ δ' ἡμῆ χῶ κοινολεχῆς Αἴγισθος ὅπως δρῶν ὑλοτόμοι σχίζουσι κάρα φονίῳ πελέκει, κούδεις τούτων οἴκτος ἀπ' ἄλλης ἢ ἴμοῦ φέρεται, σοῦ, πάτερ, οὕτως αἰκῶς οἰκτρῶς τε θανόντος. ἀλλ' οὐ μὲν δῆ</p>	<p>Eletra: O luce pura, tu etere che forte la terra avvolgi, o miei infiniti canti lamentosi; infinite, pur sul petto sanguinante, ricevi le percosse quando la notte lunga si disperde nel chiarore dell'alba e il mio giaciglio odiosa l'angoscia dei miei canti delle veglie che celebrazziosa nelle mie case! Quanto, o padre mio infelice, oh quanto ahimé, ti piango! Te non accolse Marte sanguinante in una terra barbara, benigno; ah no, la madre mia il drudo suo Egisto, come quercia i taglialegna, t'hanno diviso il capo con la scure sanguinosa! E nessuno ti compiangere, o padre se non io, se non io sola! E turpemente, tu sei morto, oh pianto!</p>
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<p>λήξω θρήνων στυγερῶν τε γόων, ἔστ' ἂν παμφεγγεῖς ἄστρων ρίπας, λεύσσω δὲ τόδ' ἦμαρ, μὴ οὐ τεκνολέτειρ' ὥς τις ἀηδῶν ἐπὶ κωκυτῷ τῶνδε πατρῶων πρὸ θυρῶν ἠχῶ πᾶσι προφωνεῖν. ὦ δῶμ' Ἀΐδου καὶ Περσεφόνης, ὦ χθόνι' Ἑρμῆ καὶ πότνι' Ἄρᾶ σεμναί τε θεῶν παῖδες Ἑρινύες, αἱ τοὺς ἀδίκως θνήσκοντας ὄραθ', αἱ τοὺς εὐνάς ὑποκλεπτομένους, ἔλθετ', ἀρήξατε, τίσασθε πατρὸς φόνον ἡμετέρου, καί μοι τὸν ἐμὸν πέμψατ' ἀδελφόν: μούνῃ γὰρ ἄγειν οὐκέτι σωκῶ λύπης ἀντίρροπον ἄχθος.</p>	<p>Oh, nemico no, non cesserò dal pianto, dai funebri lamenti! E sino a quando tutto fiamma degli astri l'impetuoso soffio; e sino a quando io la vedrò questa mia luce come un usignolo privato dei suoi figli echeggerà il mio lungo lamento! Oh fredde case di Ade e Persefone! Oh Ermete, dio sotterraneo e santa imprecazione! E voi figliuole degli dei, o Erinni onnipotenti! Voi che vendicate i morti ingiustamente, voi, le nozze contaminate, oh oh venite vendicate la morte di mio padre. Aiutatemi e a me il fratello mio mandate e consolatemi! Così sola non posso più, o benigne, sostenere il peso dell'angoscia che m'affanna!</p>
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Orestes had so far occupied, together with the pedagogue, the stage. Electra interrupts the dialogue, coming out from the palace to sing her mournful song. In the morning light (the time of action) Electra laments the fact that no light shines upon her cruel destiny and her endless sorrow. In Bemporad's translation, the very first line has an additional element (indeed an hyper-translation): it is the adjective 'forte', absent in the Greek,⁶⁹ inserted at the end of her hendecasyllable *a minore* 'O luce pura, tu etere che forte' with caesura after the fifth foot. The adjective 'forte' does not only answer the metrical necessity of having an additional disyllabic word to finish the hendecasyllable. Strength, together with endurance, is a crucial trait of Electra's psychology and one of the tragic questions raised by the play.⁷⁰ Bemporad's insertion of the adjective 'forte' in Electra's first words shows the translator's desire to enhance the element of strength and can be considered a clear example of that appropriation of themes that I mentioned beforehand. The adjective 'forte' is placed at a

⁶⁹ The adjective referred to ἀήρ (ether) is ἰσόμοιρ' which literally means 'sharing equally' (LSJ: earth's equal partner air).

⁷⁰ Studies in *Electra's* afterlife have shown how this tragedy ultimately raises utterly 'tragic' issues such as strength, misfortune, love, the relationship between freedom and necessity. See Domenico Cianciani; M. Antonietta Vito, eds., *Marguerite Yourcenar-Simon Weil. Elettire. Letture di un mito greco* (Milan: Edizioni Medusa, 2004), p. 8; Guido, Avezzù, *Sofocle, Euripide, Hofmansthal, Yourcenar, Elettra. Variazioni sul mito* (Milan: Marsilio, 2002), pp. 7-20.

critical point: it occupies the clausola of the first and the second line and it is in enjambment, the first of a long list (twenty in total) in the space of this monody. The rhythm is expanded beyond its syllabic constraints. At the same time, this enjambment creates an ambiguous suspense on the syntactic function of the adjective (predicative of the subject). Electra invokes pure light and strong ether, the highest part of sky, to introduce her endless sorrow, thus suggesting identity with the kosmos. Electra's grief is pure like the light and strong like the ether that holds the earth. Bemporad's lexical choice for ἄγνὸν is also striking. The adjective literally means chaste and it is said, according to LSJ, of things and places dedicated to gods. The reference to Electra's chaste life and the holiness of her mourning for her father's impious death, soon to be confirmed by the Erinyes' appearance (also mentioned a few lines later by Electra herself) are indeed projected in this φάος ἄγνὸν invoked by Electra. However, the rendition of ἄγνὸν with 'pura' responds more to Bemporad's rhythmic interest rather than fulfilling the holiness conveyed by this term. The choice of 'pura' has to be read in connection with the word 'luce'. The initial invocation 'o', in anacrusis, is followed by the trochaic rhythm of the words 'lúce púra', also making an internal assonance in their first syllables. These elements give to the first hemistich a descending pace in contrast with the second hemistich where the semantic presence of strength influences the rhythm. In fact, after the syntactic pause of the comma, the second hemistich has a strong beginning with the personal pronoun 'tu' followed by the *sdrucchiola* 'étere' creating a rhythmic pause before the final 'fórte'. This example shows how Bemporad works to create a correspondence between the content of the verse and its rhythm: a parallel between the semantic climax of Electra's first line and its metric structure.

In the subsequent lines lexical choices are obviously reminiscent of Leopardi: *πολλὰς μὲν θρήνων ὠδὰς* (l.88) is translated with ‘*infiniti canti lamentosi*’.⁷¹ ‘*Infinito*’ is used again for *πολύς* (l. 89 *πολλὰς δ’ ἀντήρεις ἦσθου*) as well as ‘*canto*’ in connection with the *θρήνος*, even when not coupled with *ὠδή* (l. 94). The adjective *δυοφερός* (l.91), referred to “night”, means ‘dark, musky’. Bemporad renders it as ‘lunga’ and expands the original line (composed of four words) into ‘*quando la notte lunga si disperde / nel chiarore dell’alba*’. Bemporad’s expansion of the night (thanks to the adjective ‘lunga’) aims to create a correspondence between Electra’s endless sorrowful songs and the time when she performs her *threnos*. Night, in its metaphorical stance, is an essential stage for Electra as a tragic heroine and a metapoetic space for Bemporad as a translator. G. Méautis pinpointed how Electra’s tragic initiation begins and develops when she experiences “*la nuit obscure*”, a state of absolute desperation. Yet the experience of darkness is only to discover the light.⁷² Bemporad’s expansion introduces the light to be found by the tragic hero at the end of his journey. However, the poet-translator here is not only anticipating what the Greek play has not revealed yet. The desire of coupling ‘*notte lunga*’ and ‘*chiarore dell’alba*’ also gives us an insight into Bemporad’s poetic engagement with the text. Bemporad’s ‘*lunghe notti*’ (or ‘*i troppo notturni sudori*’ to use Carlo Izzo’s words) devoted to translation and poetry are not merely the object of a curious anecdote. Her use of the night time for poetic meditation is, as Pagnanelli subtly observed, an element of further clarification (*integrazione chiarificatrice*) in our understating of Bemporad’s poetic space, namely the Night.⁷³ Night is the privileged space for concentration and meditation, the time when appearances dissolve

⁷¹ Another example of Bemporad’s predilection for the word ‘*infinito*’ is found at ll. 231-232. Electra is sharing with the chorus her distressful psychological situation and endless pains. Specifically, the heroine refers to her laments as *ἀνάριθμος*, literally ‘without measure’. Bemporad again translated this word with the adjective *infinito*. Other examples of passages where Bemporad chooses the word ‘*infinito*’ are l. 134 (*παντοίας φιλότητος/infinito amore*), l. 162 *τὸν ἀνήνυτον οἶτον ἔχουσα κακῶν/soffrendo il mio destino infinito d’affanno*); l. 254 (*πολλοῖς θρήνοις/infiniti lamenti*); l. 489 (*ἦξει καὶ πολύπους καὶ πολύχειρ /con le mani infinite, coi piedi suoi infiniti*); l. 565 (*πολλὰ πνεύματ’ /venti infiniti*); l. 9 (*πολυχρῆσους /oro infinito*); l. 1076 (*ὄπως / ἄ πάνδυρτος ἀηδών*; come usignolo d’infinito pianto).

⁷² George Méautis, *Sophocle. Essai sur le héros tragique* (Paris: Edition Albin Michel, 1957), p. 234 and p. 244.

⁷³ Remo Pagnanelli, *Giovanna Bemporad: poesia e traduzione* in «*Otto-Novecento*», XII, 1988, p. 214.

and a truer dialogue with the world and the Self can be established. Night as a symbol of Death (together with the *ombra*) has a key role in Bemporad's *Esercizi*, and specifically in the section *Diari*. Bemporad's decision to introduce the element of light is the first example where we can see Bemporad's desire of creating a parallel between Electra and her poetic persona. Electra lives in the Night, as a symbol of desperation. For her, light is a metaphor for her desire to reunite with her brother Orestes. For Bemporad, the metaphor works similarly. Let us consider the dedication of her *Esercizi*: '*a una forma sorella*'. Pagnanelli has observed that Bemporad believed in poetry as a pre-natal reunion.⁷⁴ The *forma sorella* – Electra's light – is Bemporad's conception of poetry. Bemporad aims at reuniting with her poetic Self through poetry itself. The poetic exercise is therefore dedicated to poetry itself and to her poetic persona, perceived by Bemporad as a sister with whom she desires to reunite. In Bemporad's case, just as in Electra's, night is the path leading to the light.

At the end of the passage (ll. 105-110) Electra uses the light of the stars and the image of the nightingale deprived of its own baby-birds as terms of comparison for the length of her lament. This is another opportunity for Bemporad to develop the theme of light in connection with the length of desperation and sorrow. The insertion of the possessive adjective 'mia' (absent in the Greek) in the first hemistich ('questa mia luce') stresses the personal connection with the dimension of light. Bemporad enhances again the length by introducing 'lungo' which is absent in the original. In addition to this, she chooses a verb with a high number of vowels 'echeggiare' and places the word in enjambment. The invocation to Hades and Persephone then reinstates the connection with the realm of Death (Oh fredde case / di Ade e Persefone! Oh Ermete, / dio sotterraneo e santa imprecazione!)

⁷⁴ Pagnanelli, p. 213: 'L'epigrafe di *Esercizi* (*a una forma sorella*) rende bene lo sforzo per ri-trovare la parte mancante di sè, la fede nella poesia come modalità della riunione prenatale; il sintagma va letto in una duplice direzione, fecondamente ambivalente: la «forma sorella» è *in primis* la parola, poi, per chi fa poesia, la traduzione e viceversa, in seguito anche la consolatrice Natura. A mio giudizio, è ineliminabile la simmetria psichica con la desinenza «femminile» del vocabolo.'

The passage also shows how Bemporad uses Turolla's translation. Let us compare the two translations:

Enrico Turolla	Giovanna Bemporad
Oh! Ma io, no, dal lamento non cesserò; dai funebri pianti! E sino a quando, tutto fiamma degli astri l'impetuoso soffio; sino a quando io veda questa luce, come un rusignolo di prole orbato, farò l'eco del mio gemito qui fuori a tutti risuonare: Oh! casa di Ades e Persefone! Oh! sotterraneo Ermete e santa imprecazione!	Oh, nemico no, non cesserò dal pianto, dai funebri lamenti! E sino a quando tutto fiamma degli astri l'impetuoso soffio; e sino a quando io la vedrò questa mia luce come un rosignolo privato dei suoi figli echeggerà il mio lungo lamento! Oh fredde case di Ade e Persefone! Oh Ermete, dio sotterraneo e santa imprecazione!

Lexical borrowings are the most evident, not just in this passage. Bemporad draws from Turolla's translation as if she were using another dictionary. This excerpt features a fairly exceptional instance: Bemporad borrows an entire sentence from Turolla ('E sino a quando, tutto fiamma degli astri l'impetuoso soffio'). Another phenomenon to observe is Bemporad's use of a language less archaic combined with amplification. Turolla's sentence 'di prole orbato' becomes longer in Bemporad's 'privato dei suoi figli'. The Latin-modelled sentence (verb at the end) 'farò l'eco del mio gemito qui fuori a tutti risuonare' is rendered by Bemporad with a more standard language structure: 'e sino a quando io la vedrò / questa mia luce come un usignolo /privato dei suoi figli echeggerà/ il mio lungo lamento!' Compared to Turolla's translation, Bemporad opts for an agile and less archaic syntax. The comparison between the two translations shows a very different use of punctuation. Turolla's prose uses it in a way that creates several paratactic periods, also in the lyrical sections. Conversely, Bemporad seeks longer verses aiming to reproduce the lyrical dimension of Electra's monody.

The high number of vocatives and the exclamations of grief, five in the original Greek and eighteen in Bemporad's translation, serve to highlight Electra's nature: she is

pure lament.⁷⁵ Bemporad further enhances this feature thanks to the position of these vocatives next to a word beginning or ending with a vowel. The verse thus stretches in length as the accumulation of vowels produces longer sounds. Let us consider the lines 86-117 and the position where the vocatives/exclamation of grief are placed:

O luce pura, o etere che forte
 la terra avvolgi, o miei infiniti canti
 lamentosi; infinite, pur sul petto
 sanguinante ricevi [sentito] le percosse,
 quando la notte bruma si disperde
 nel chiarore dell'alba e il mio giaciglio
 odioso sa l'angoscia dei miei canti
 delle veglie che celebri festosa
 nelle mie case! Quanto o padre mio
 infelice, oh quanto ahimé, ti piango!
 Te non accolse Marte sanguinante
 in una terra barbara, benigno;
ah no, la madre mia, il drudo suo
 Egisto, come quercia i taglialegna,
 t'hanno diviso il capo con la scure
 sanguinosa! E nessuno ti compiangere,
o padre se non io, se non io sola!
 E turpemente, tu sei morto, oh pianto!
Oh, ma io no, non cesserò dal pianto,
 dai funebri lamenti! [Oh lamentoso] E sino a quando
 tutto fiamma degli astri l'impetuoso
 soffio; e sino a quando io la vedrò
 questa mia luce come
 un rosignolo
 privato dei suoi figli
 echeggerà
 il mio lungo lamento!
Oh fredde case
 di Ade e Persefone!
Oh Ermete
 dio sotterraneo
 e santa imprecazione!
 E voi figliuole
 degli dei, o
Erinni
 onnipotenti!
 Voi che vendicate
 i morti ingiustamente, Voi, le nozze

⁷⁵ Méautis, p. 232: '[...] Car voilà la vraie nature d'Électre, elle est un cri. Et Sophocle – par ce procédé si fréquent chez lui de la répétition – a accentué cette notion. Dans les trois cents vers qui vont du v. 77 au v. 377 on ne voit pas revenir moins de vingt fois des mots qui se rapportent aux plaints, aux gémissements, aux lamentations, aux cris d'Électre.' On this aspect see Anne Carson, *Screaming in translation in Sophocles. Electra*, tr. by Anne Carson (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 41-8.

contaminate,
oh, oh, venite
 vendicate la
 morte di mio
 padre,
 aiutatemi e a me il
 fratello
 mio
 mandate
 a consolarmi!

The possibility of having several different rhythms is thus expanded while these long vocalic sounds can be read as the musical correspondence of Electra's grief.

Another example of *amplificatio* is to be found at the beginning of the *parodos* (ll. 121-128):

<p>Χορός ὦ παῖ, παῖ δυστανοτάτας Ἥλέκτρα ματρός, τίν' αἰεὶ τάκεις ὦδ' ἀκόρεστον οἰμωγὰν τὸν πάλαι ἐκ δολερᾶς ἀθεώτατα ματρός ἀλόντ' ἀπάταις Ἀγαμέμνονα κακᾶ τε χειρὶ πρόδοτον; ὥς ὁ τάδε πορῶν ὄλοιτ', εἴ μοι θέμις τάδ' αὐδᾶν.</p>	<p>Coro Figliuola mia, o Elettra, tu figliuola di madre sciagurata, perché spargi inutilmente sempre il tuo insaziato gemito? Il padre tuo che da lunghi anni fu empicamente tradito dalla mano malvagia di tua madre ingannatrice Agamennone, piangi. Oh possa presto morire lei che ha osato profanare con la morte il suo talamo, se pure io posso dirlo!</p>
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The chorus is here sympathising with Electra. The horrible crimes are again the object of discussion together with Electra's endless weeping. Bemporad inserts a small rewriting summarizing Clytemnestra's crime: 'Oh possa presto /morire lei che ha osato profanare / con la morte il suo talamo, se pure /io posso dirlo!'. The original Greek 'ὥς ὁ τάδε πορῶν / ὄλοιτ' εἴ μοι θέμις τάδ' αὐδᾶν is more reticent (literally: May the one who did that perish, if I may speak such a curse without breaking the gods' laws). Death and thalamus are combined in the same line, providing a powerful image of Clytemnestra's impious sin as well as revisiting the literary topos of eros and *thanatos*. Bemporad makes explicit what was left intentionally implicit in the original, and has the occasion to develop another

hendecasyllable and a final *quinario*.⁷⁶ Let us compare Bemporad's and Turolla's translations to see her use of the Italian reference edition:

Turolla	Bemporad
Figlia mia, figlia di madre sciagurata, Elettra qual mai così insaziato gemito, sempre, invano, spargi? Colui che, da anni lunghi, per inganni, dell'ingannatrice tua madre, empivamente fu preso Agamennone, da mano malvagia tradito, tu piangi. Oh! Chi ciò ha commesso, possa perire, se pur ciò è a me lecito dire.	Figliuola mia, o Elettra, tu figliuola di madre sciagurata, perché spargi inutilmente sempre il tuo insaziato gemito? Il padre tuo che da lunghi anni fu empivamente tradito dalla mano malvagia di tua madre ingannatrice Agamennone, piangi. Oh possa presto morire lei che ha osato profanare con la morte il suo talamo, se pure io posso dirlo.

The comparison shows Bemporad's lexical borrowings (*madre sciagurata, gemito, spargi, empivamente, mano malvagia*) while highlighting that Bemporad's oscillation between less archaic choices (like 'morire' instead of the more dramatic 'perire') and more archaic choices (*figliuola*) follows metrical reasons; in this case the need to have a trisyllabic word (*fi-gliuo-la*) instead of a disyllabic one (*fi-glia*). Word order is another criterion. Turolla's 'Colui che, da anni lunghi, per inganni, dell'ingannatrice tua madre' is changed by Bemporad who creates three hendecasyllables thoroughly interlaced:

gemito il padre | tuo che da lunghi ánni
 fu empivamente | tradito dalla máno
 malvagia di tua | madre ingannatríce

The first is a hendecasyllable *a minore* with the stress on the fourth syllable. The metrical pause of caesura *femminile* after 'tuo' does not coincide with a syntactical pause. The effect is that of creating a sighing moment of suspension after the name of the father. The second

⁷⁶ Other passages where Bemporad employs this mechanism are to be found at ll. 258 ff. In this case, Bemporad makes explicit what was left unspecified in the Greek: 'οὐ δρῶν τὰδ' ἄν' becomes 'e non piangere'. At ll. 515 ff. Bemporad adds a few words to finish the section with a perfect hendecasyllable: 'ἔλειπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου / πολύπονος αἰκία' becomes 'l'affanno e il disonore abbandonò/ la desolata casa e il nostro lare.'

hemistich ends with synaloepha in the metrical syllable (-ghián-). A longer vocalic sound conveys the semantic meaning of the final part of the verse (*lunghi anni*). The intimate tone of the line is then followed by two hendecasyllables (twelve syllables) developing Clytemnestra's murder. A chiasmic structure is also visible between the first and the third line: 'padre' and 'madre', and 'tuo' and 'tua' are in a crossed disposition, which works as a container for the thematic heart of the central line: the impious betrayal committed by the murderer's hand. In this way both the father and the mother figure are left out from direct connection to the crime, which is associated with the impiety and to the hand. The first and the third verse are also structured similarly: the possessive adjectives 'tuo/tua' follow or precede the caesura creating a metrical pause. The possessives, whether they follow or precede the noun, create a sort of internal enjambment, which impacts the whole length of the passage. The first verse insists on the length thanks to the number of words used to compose the verse (eight in total) and abundance of vocalic sounds. The third verse uses assonances (*malvagia tua / madre ingannatrice*) and the alliteration of strong patterns of mute/voiced dental in conjunction with the liquid sound of the 'r' (dr/tr) to highlight the harshness of Clytemnestra's lies. The analysis of these three hendecasyllables gives us an idea of the rhythmic movement created by Bemporad within the verse. An oscillation of longer sounds, internal fractures and suspended pauses produces an unstable rhythm aiming to reproduce the emotional distress in Electra's lament.

Let us move to the third episodion (ll. 1127-1170). Electra has been told that Orestes has died and she has been given her brother's ashes:

Ἥλέκτρα

ὦ φιλάτου μνημῆιον ἀνθρώπων ἐμοὶ
 ψυχῆς Ὀρέστου λοιπόν, ὡς σ' ἀπ' ἐλπίδων
 οὐχ ὥνπερ ἐξέπεμπον εἰσεδεξάμην.
 νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ὄντα βαστάζω χερσῶν,
 δόμων δέ σ', ὦ παῖ, λαμπρὸν ἐξέπεμψ' ἐγώ.
 ὡς ὄφελον πάροιθεν ἐκλιπεῖν βίον,

Elettra

O tu ricordo
 dell'uomo a me più caro, tu che solo
 rimani della vita del mio Oreste!
 Come diversamente ti rivedo
 dopo tante speranze ahimè da quelle
 che t'avevo affidate! Tu sei morto

πρὶν ἐς ξένην σε γαίαν ἐκπέμψαι χεροῖν
 κλέψασα ταῖνδε κάνασώσασθαι φόνου,
 ὅπως θανῶν ἔκεισο τῇ τόθ' ἡμέρᾳ,
 τύμβου πατρώου κοινὸν εἰληχῶς μέρος.
 νῦν δ' ἐκτὸς οἴκων ἀπὶ γῆς ἄλλης φυγὰς
 κακῶς ἀπώλου, σῆς κασιγνήτης δίχα,
 κοῦτ' ἐν φίλαισι χερσὶν ἢ τάλαιν' ἐγὼ
 λουτροῖς σ' ἐκόσμησ' οὔτε παμφλέκτου πυρὸς
 ἀνειλόμην, ὡς εἰκός, ἄθλιον βάρος,
 ἀλλ' ἐν ξέναισι χερσὶ κηδευθεὶς τάλας
 μικρὸς προσήκεις ὄγκος ἐν μικρῷ κύτει.
 οἴμοι τάλαινα τῆς ἐμῆς πάλαι τροφῆς
 ἀνωφελήτου, τὴν ἐγὼ θάμ' ἀμφὶ σοὶ
 πόνῳ γλυκεῖ παρέσχον: οὔτε γάρ ποτε
 μητρὸς σύ γ' ἦσθα μᾶλλον ἢ κάμου φίλος,
 οὔθ' οἱ κατ' οἶκον ἦσαν, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τροφός,
 ἐγὼ δ' ἀδελφὴ σοὶ προσηυδώμην αἰεὶ.
 νῦν δ' ἐκλέλοιπε ταῦτ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ
 θανόντι σὺν σοί: πάντα γὰρ συναρπάσας
 θέλλ' ὅπως βέβηκας. οἴχεται πατήρ:
 τέθνηκ' ἐγὼ σοί: φροῦδος αὐτὸς εἰ θανῶν:
 γελῶσι δ' ἐχθροί: μαίνεται δ' ὑφ' ἡδονῆς
 μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ, ἧς ἐμοὶ σὺ πολλάκις
 φήμας λάθρα προὔπεμπες ὡς φανούμενος
 τιμωρὸς αὐτός. ἀλλὰ ταῦθ' ὁ δυστυχῆς
 δαίμων ὁ σὸς τε κάμὸς ἐξαφείλετο,
 ὃς σ' ὠδὲ μοι προὔπεμψεν ἀντὶ φιλάτης
 μορφῆς σποδὸν τε καὶ σκιὰν ἀνωφελῆ.
 οἴμοι μοι.
 ὦ δέμας οἰκτρὸν. φεῦ φεῦ.
 ὦ δεινοτάτας, οἴμοι μοι,
 πεμφθεὶς κελεύθους, φίλταθ', ὡς μ' ἀπώλεσας:
 ἀπώλεσας δῆτ', ὦ κασίγνητον κάρᾳ.
 τοιγὰρ σὺ δέξαι μ' ἐς τὸ σὸν τόδε στέγος,
 τὴν μηδὲν εἰς τὸ μηδέν, ὡς σὺν σοὶ κάτω
 ναίω τὸ λοιπόν: καὶ γὰρ ἠνίκ' ἦσθ' ἄνω,
 ξὺν σοὶ μετείχον τῶν ἴσων, καὶ νῦν ποθῶ
 τοῦ σοῦ θανούσα μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι τάφου.
 τοὺς γὰρ θανόντας οὐχ ὀρῶ λυπούμενους,

ora non sei più nulla e io ti stringo
 tra le mie mani. (Oh fossi morta prima
 prima di abbandonarti in una terra
 straniera e sola prima di mandarti
 in questa terra a conquistarti il regno
 della tua fanciullezza e ritornando
 la più nera compagna che fingendo
 la tua città non potrà più mostrare i lumi
 delle stelle il mio pianto salirà
 con più dolore ad ascendere il cielo
 se ti mando). Eri fanciullo ancora
 e io ti allontanai dalle mie case
 figliuolo luminoso. Oh fossi morta
 prima di abbandonarti in una terra
 straniera, di sottrarti con le mie mani
 alla strage! Oh allora in quel giorno
 avresti riposato accanto al padre morto!
 Ma ora esule lontano dalla tua casa
 dalla tua sorella, sei morto
 Malamente in una terra straniera.
 E ora queste mie care mani
 t'hanno onorato morto, oh me
 infelice!
 Ed ora ti sollevo io
 dalla fiamma del rogo
 peso miserello. E accolto
 in mano d'altri, tu piccola cosa
 sei ritornato in una piccola urna.
 Ahi, la mia antica cura ch'io per te,
 dolce fatica, sopportai! Tua madre
 mai non t'amò quanto t'amavo io!
 Fui io la tua nutrice, e non la donna
 Di casa: io che tu sempre mi chiamavi
 Sorella: ed ora tutto con te, morto,
 in un giorno soltanto è dileguato.
 Tu hai portato con te le mie speranze
 rapido come la rapida procella
 tu sei partito. Il padre è morto vedi,
 io sono morta. Ed anche tu sei morto,
 non sei più nulla: ridono i nemici
 è folle per la gioia la tua madre
 che non è madre: e tu a lei e a me
 mandavi ad annunciare di nascosto,
 oh tante volte che saresti apparso
 a vendicare il padre. Ma quei sogni
 un demone malvagio è il tuo e il mio
 li ha dispersi nel vento e mi ha
 mandato invece della tua
 adorata figura, ombra e cenere vana.
 Ahimè! Oh vita miseranda! Ahi, ahi! O
 tu creatura adorata che sei venuta qui
 Per lacrimosi tremiti, oh come tu mi hai
 distrutta! Si tu m'hai distrutta,
 fratello mio! Accogliami, ricevi

	<p>in questo tuo rifugio la sorella che non è ormai più nulla e tu sei nulla. Così vivrò per sempre accanto a te! Anche quando vivevi, tu con me sopportavi il mio fato di dolore, ed ora voglio morta riposare accanto a te, fratellino! Oh è vero, i morti non soffrono più nulla.</p>
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The three words of the initial *quinario* exhibit three fundamental features of Bemporad's Electra: the vocative, recalling the heroine's constant invocation, the personal pronoun 'tu', hinting at the dialogical dimension of Electra's lament, and the element of memory (*ricordo*). 'Ricordo' is a key concept in this tragedy. The entire play revolves around past actions: mourning Agamemnon's death, bringing justice to the father's memory and repeating Orestes' past promises. Now that Orestes is dead the dimension of memory encompasses everything. The cinerary urn is the symbol of her brother's memory and the only physicality left of him:

ὦ φιλάτου μνημείον ἀνθρώπων ἐμοὶ
ψυχῆς Ὀρέστου λοιπόν, ὡς σ' ἀπ' ἐλπίδων
οὐχ ὧνπερ ἐξέπεμπον εἰσεδεξάμην.

O tu ricordo
dell'uomo a me più caro, tu che solo
rimani della vita del mio Oreste!
Come diversamente ti rivedo
dopo tante speranze ahimè da quelle
che t'avevo affidate!

The original concision of the Greek (three lines) is expanded by Bemporad's translation (six lines). The insertion of the personal pronoun 'mio', absent in the original, in synalœpha with the name of Orestes, recalls the symbolic sound 'o' of her lament, as well as reinforcing the brotherhood between Electra and Orestes. The personal pronoun 'tu' (in its direct and indirect forms) is repeated overall five times, and highlights the dialogic nature of this monody. The *μνημείον* (*ricordo*), the key word of this passage, leads Bemporad to develop, in the following lines, an excursus on lost youth, vanished hope and a wishful death:

(Oh fossi morta prima
 prima di abbandonarti in una terra
 straniera e sola prima di mandarti
 in questa terra a conquistarti il regno
 della tua fanciullezza e ritornando
 la più nera compagna che fingendo
 la tua città non potrà più mostrare i lumi
 delle stelle il mio pianto salirà
 con più dolore ad ascendere il cielo
 se ti mando).

The passage is an addition, as signalled by the brackets in the manuscripts. Solitude, tears and pain are very Leopardian themes too. Had she died before abandoning Orestes, she would not feel so much pain. The presence of two gerunds (*ritornando*; *fingendo*, characteristically Leopardian verbs) create a syntactically complex construction enhancing the impossible hypothesis, which echoes through the entire passage by means of the extensive enjambements. The subject of the first gerund is ‘La più nera compagna’, i.e. the Night. The theme of return, which had a positive connotation for Electra until this moment, is paired with that of the Night and Death. Yet the Night, on this occasion, does not lead to light and brings a broken wish to Electra. In the following lines, in fact, Electra weeps over Orestes’ shadow (*ombra*), another personification of the Night. This identification of Death and the word ‘compagna’ surfaces also in Bemporad’s original poem ‘Mia compagna implacabile la morte’.⁷⁷ In this poem, the personification of Death introduces the element of long and silent vigils (*la morte / persuade a lunghe veglie taciturne*) recalling Electra’s sleepless nights spent mourning. After this journey into impossibility, Electra steps again into the realm of remembrance (*Eri fanciullo ancora / e io ti allontanai dalle mie case / figliuolo luminoso*). Desperation now leaves space for the desire of death as a way to emptiness, for the detachment from sensorial perception. The desire to be nothing but emptiness is where Electra finds the two halves reuniting (*la sorella / che non è ormai più*

⁷⁷ Bemporad, *Esercizi*, p. 15.

nulla /e tu sei nulla). At the peak of her desperation Electra again finds a new vital impulse. The void in which they reunite for eternity is pure joy for Electra (*Così vivrò per sempre accanto a te!*). The motif of a new life in death also emerges in Bemporad's poetry, in the poem *Intarsio* (*O morte nella vita /la certezza che usurpa in noi da vivi/ tutto il senso di esistere*).⁷⁸ The desire of emptiness and death is also the last reference of a series of Leopardian echoes in this passage. The Leopardian themes of lost youth, memory, solitude and broken hope were tightly interconnected in this excerpt. However, Electra's joy as a consequence of a lack of desire and suffering is probably the most resonant one. Orestes is dead, and after desperation, Electra embraces death as cessation of suffering:

ed ora voglio morta riposare
accanto a te, fratelllo! Oh è vero, i morti
non soffrono più nulla.

Death becomes the new light. It is the place where she can finally rest with her beloved brother. Pagnanelli has noticed Leopardi's influence on Bemporad's poetic discourse:

Per mezzo di paramenti velari e di soavi paesaggi, la Notte lenisce il dolore con l'efficacia della contemplazione, il cui orizzonte è quello del riposo non violento. Al margine della visione si spalanca quell'altra notte (della letteratura e del libro) di cui discorre Blanchot, identificandone gli specifici orfici e metafisici nelle poetiche di Rilke e Mallarmé. In questi termini si realizza un'esperienza al contempo cognitiva e di abreazione. *Analogon* semantico e fonico della Morte e del Sonno, nella Notte si avvera, si rende possibile l'astensione del e dal desiderio (che Leopardi giudica nello *Zibaldone* stato della massima gioia, dell'infinito piacere che si prova nell'epochizzazione degli stimoli), con emergenza d'una rêverie nella fantasia della fine felice, nel rientro nel reame rassicurante della Natura.⁷⁹

The desire for emptiness, recalling Electra's incredible physical suffering, will become a fundamental theme in Bemporad's own poetry, especially in the section *Diari*. The dialogue between Electra and Orestes in Bemporad's translation (ll. 1203-1229) is particularly telling:

⁷⁸ Bemporad, *Intarsio* in *Esercizi*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Pagnanelli, p. 214.

<p>Ὀρέστης μέθες τόδ' ἄγγος νῦν, ὅπως τὸ πᾶν μάθης.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα μὴ δῆτα πρὸς θεῶν τοῦτό μ' ἐργάσῃ, ξένη.</p> <p>Ὀρέστης πειθου λέγοντι κούχ ἁμαρτήσῃ ποτέ.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα μὴ, πρὸς γενείου, μὴ 'ξέλη τὰ φίλτατα.</p> <p>Ὀρέστης οὐ φημ' ἑάσειν.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγὼ σέθεν, Ὀρέστα, τῆς σῆς εἰ στερήσομαι ταφῆς.</p> <p>Ὀρέστης εὐφημα φώνει: πρὸς δίκης γὰρ οὐ στένεις.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα πῶς τὸν θανόντ' ἀδελφὸν οὐ δίκη στένω;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης οὐ σοι προσήκει τήνδε προσφωνεῖν φάτιν.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα οὕτως ἄτιμός εἰμι τοῦ τεθνηκότος;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης 1215 ἄτιμος οὐδενὸς σύ: τοῦτο δ' οὐχὶ σόν.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα εἴπερ γ' Ὀρέστου σῶμα βαστάζω τόδε;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης ἀλλ' οὐκ Ὀρέστου, πλὴν λόγῳ γ' ἠσκημένον.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ποῦ δ' ἔστ' ἐκείνου τοῦ ταλαιπώρου τάφος;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης οὐκ ἔστι: τοῦ γὰρ ζώντος οὐκ ἔστιν τάφος.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα πῶς εἶπας, ὦ παῖ;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης ψεῦδος οὐδὲν ὦν λέγω.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ἦ ζῆ γὰρ ἀνὴρ;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης εἴπερ ἔμψυχός γ' ἐγώ.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ἦ γὰρ σὺ κείνος;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης τήνδε προσβλέψασά μου σφραγίδα πατρὸς ἔκμαθ' εἰ σαφῆ λέγω.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ὦ φίλτατον φῶς.</p> <p>Ὀρέστης φίλτατον, συμμαρτυρῶ.</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ὦ φθέγμ', ἀφίκου;</p> <p>Ὀρέστης μηκέτ' ἄλλοθεν πύθη,</p> <p>Ἥλέκτρα ἔχω σε χερσίν;</p>	<p>Oreste Lascia allora quest'anfora che io ti dirò tutto.</p> <p>Elettra Oh nel nome di Dio, no no o straniero. Non staccarmi da lui.</p> <p>Oreste Non puoi sbagliare se mi obbedisci.</p> <p>Elettra Non allontanarmi da quanto ho di più caro, oh no, nel nome di coloro che ami.</p> <p>Oreste Non intendo levartelo.</p> <p>Elettra Oh, per te me sventurata, Oreste. Non potrò nemmeno darti sepoltura.</p> <p>Oreste Ma no, non ha ragione il tuo lamento: è ingiusto che tu pianga.</p> <p>Elettra Come? È ingiusto ch'io pianga il mio fratello morto?</p> <p>Oreste No, non conviene pronunciare questa parola.</p> <p>Elettra Dunque, sono tanto una cosa da nulla per costui che è morto?</p> <p>Oreste Oh no, non sei cosa da nulla tu no; ma questo non è il tuo...</p> <p>Elettra Ma eppure è proprio questo ch'io sostengo il corpo d'Oreste!</p> <p>Oreste No, di Oreste: una finzione l'ha preparato.</p> <p>Elettra Ma dov'è allora il corpo di quel misero?</p> <p>Oreste Non c'è: non hanno tomba i vivi.</p> <p>Elettra Come hai detto, giovane?</p>
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<p>Ὀρέστης ὡς τὰ λοιπ' ἔχοις αἰεί. Ἥλέκτρα ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, ὦ πολίτιδες, ὄρατ' Ὀρέστην τόνδε, μηχαναῖσι μὲν θανόντα, νῦν δὲ μηχαναῖς σεσωσμένον.</p>	<p>Oreste Non ti mento. Elettra È vivo allora? Oreste Sì non lo vedi? È vivo? Elettra Tu, sei tu? Oreste Sì, se non credi, guarda questa gemma di nostro padre. Elettra Oh luce mia adorata! Oreste Oh sì, tanto adorata! Elettra Oh sei venuta, o voce cara? Oreste Più non domandare notizie agli altri. Elettra Sei fra le mie braccia! Oreste Deh possa tu per sempre tra le braccia stringermi, o cara! Elettra O donne mie dilette! O cittadine, lo vedete voi il nostro Oreste? Per inganni è morto e per inganni ora è ritornato!</p>
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The negative tone of the dialogue continues to stress the emptiness perceived by Electra after Orestes' death. Bemporad's translation boosts this quality by placing numerous vocatives ('oh') placed next to the negative particle. The negation 'Non' and 'no' together with the 'oh' achieves the double goal of lingering on vocalic sounds and recalling, on the level of the signifier, the metaphorical presence of the 'Notte' as the deepest moment of Electra's desperation. This passage offers an example of Bemporad's creative hendecasyllables. The metre is often broken in two halves, alternately pronounced by Electra and Orestes. The desire to break the verse is particularly evident from the manuscript, where the break is signalled by a blank space. This way of constructing the verse will surface again in her poetry.⁸⁰ In this dialogue we can also witness how Bemporad, while keeping the metrical structure, is not afraid of employing prosaic solutions such as

⁸⁰ See for instance the poems *Paesaggio* (p. 26) and *Intarsio* (p. 30).

the expressions ‘Sì, non lo vedi?’ or ‘Come hai detto, giovane?’ or ‘È vivo?’.⁸¹ This stylistic choice is typical of Bemporad’s overall attempt to challenge a use of language informed by classicistic and archaicizing tendencies. The comparison with Turolla’s translation was particularly useful to show this difference.

4. *Electra* as a paradigm of Bemporad’s poetic quest: “l’ombra tragica” as access to the “forma sorella”

The pair *experience-reflection* (in opposition to that of *theory-practice*) in Antoine Berman’s *La traduction et la lettre ou l’Auberge du lointain* (1999)⁸² provides a useful approach to the study of Bemporad’s translation of Sophocles’ *Electra* and its impact on her poetic discourse. Berman, a professional translator and a theorist of translation, elevated his own translating experiences up to the level of philosophical reflections. His work aimed at defying the ancillary role of translation and shifted the focus onto the ethical problems of translations⁸³. Specifically, the couplet *experience-reflection* can help us to see how through the experience of translation the translator reflects and becomes aware of his/her *in fieri* process of being the *opus* translated and at the same time becomes aware of one’s own essence in this very experience of translation. This conceptual framework allows us to consider Bemporad’s poetic translation of Sophocles’ *Electra* as the *experience* from where a *reflection* on her own poetic voice originated. Bemporad ventured “au profond de soi”, as Bonnefoy puts it, and discovered “un sé antico” following Leopardi’s model. This process is visible in the poetic translation of *Electra*, a mythical figure who, as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, captured Bemporad’s interest and exerted a profound influence in

⁸¹ Other colloquial expressions are to be found at ll. 310 ff. in *Electra*’s exchange of opinions with the chorus: ‘Elettra: Domanda pure: egli è lontano’ ‘Coro: Appunto; voglio chiederti: tu che cosa pensi/ di tuo fratello? Tarderà? Verrà? Vorrei saperlo.’ Towards the end of the tragedy, in the exodus, we read more expressions recalling spoken usage of language: ‘Elettra: Oreste, come va? / Oreste: Va tutto bene in casa’; ‘Elettra: Dunque ragazzi non indietro? Oreste: L’uomo è vicino, vedete.’; ‘Oreste: Sì, come tu dici / Agiamo. Coraggio!’.

⁸² Antoine Berman, *La traduction et la lettre ou l’auberge du lointain* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999).

⁸³ On the influence exerted by Benjamin, Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Ricoeur on Berman’s work see Lee Hyang; Yun Seong-Woo, *Antoine Berman’s Philosophical Reflections on Language and Translation: The Possibility of Translating without Platonism* in «Filozofia», 66, 2011, n. 4, 336-346.

her poetic discourse. The reflection stimulated by this experience is traceable in Bemporad's *Esercizi*. The translations of Greek tragedy belong chronologically to the 40s, when Bemporad was finalizing the first edition of her book of poems *Esercizi*, especially the section of the *Diari*.⁸⁴ I therefore suggest reading these translations as the place where Bemporad establishes and shapes her definitive poetic themes: the translations show *in nuce* some cores of interest which will distinguish her poetry, and bring to the fore a specific interest in mythological cycles which she will further develop in her poetry as a constant.

My analysis of Sophocles' *Electra* has shown how Bemporad emphasises the themes of strength and of ever lasting sorrowful song in various ways, including the appropriation of Leopardian imagery (the adjective 'infinito' occurs 12 times!). The element of length as a major feature of Electra's song, heroine 'sventurata' to use Bemporad's key word for the entire translation (32 occurrences), introduces the ethical implications embedded in the tragedy. The idea of an enduring lament implies, in *Electra's* case, the notion of resistance and justice. Indeed, a number of intellectuals interpreted the heroine as a symbol of rightful claim for justice overwhelmed by the oppression of an unjust power.⁸⁵ Bemporad's focus on the length of *Electra's* lament serves to emphasize the everlasting necessity of poetry. On this necessity, or on this devotion to the cause of poetry, Bemporad lays the foundation for her interpretation of the Greek heroine: *Electra* becomes the symbol of a relentless devotion to poetic song. Pier Paolo Pasolini, in his review of the *Esercizi*, highlights the origin of Bemporad's poetry: it is generated by a lack, a void that for Pasolini is a 'vuoto

⁸⁴ Russi, *Esercizi di assoluto*, p. 72: 'In un incontro del 2009 alla Casa Internazionale delle Donne di Roma, Bemporad ha affermato che il nucleo originario delle sue poesie (la sezione *Diari*, nella quale l'opposizione giovinezza/vecchiaia è più accentuata) risale a quando aveva quindici anni.'

⁸⁵ Simone Weil translated and interpreted Sophocles' *Electra* as a means to defy social injustice and, subsequently, as a symbolic figure of the reunion between God and the human being. On this see Cianciani; Vito, *Elettire. Letture di un mito greco*, pp. 81-114.

d'amore'.⁸⁶ Pagnanelli, in his essay on Bemporad's work, expands on this: 'Da questa mancanza perenne scaturisce la perennità della differenza'.⁸⁷ Electra has been deprived of her father and of her brother. These losses make Electra a *diversa*. She is most hated by her mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. She is also despised by her sister and, at times, by the chorus as well which explicitly reproaches her at the beginning of the play for her overly intense mourning. From this condition of void and difference Electra begins her song, a lament of lost love, a call for justice, a desire for death. Electra longs only to reconnect with Orestes, her beloved brother. Bemporad, with specific reference to the section *Diari*, shapes her poetic self on the repetition of this condition of loss and isolation making death the protagonist of the majority of the poems. Her lament is pure desire to reunite with her *forma sorella*, poetry itself. The enactment of this pattern results in poems where death is celebrated. Pagnanelli described these repetitive situations as 'variazioni innestate su connotazioni ritualistiche e ripetitive che aprono al delirio abbandonico, estasi mortuaria e all'incantamento liberatorio'.⁸⁸ Andrea Zanzotto underscored that Bemporad's poetic creation happened in a cyclic movement:

Giovanna Bemporad aveva già fin da allora fissati i termini di un suo movimento ciclico, da "eterno ritorno", quasi al di fuori del flusso della storia con i suoi eventi ma anche con le sue mode spesso effimere. La "classicità" della Bemporad vive dunque di un compatto nucleo di temi e linee stilistiche, destinati non a variare ma ad approfondirsi, ad arricchirsi quasi sotterraneamente nel tempo.⁸⁹

The passage sheds light on the structural importance of themes in Bemporad's poetic world. Her unremitting investigation of selected topics becomes an opportunity to reassert the necessity of these very topics. Thanks to this research, Bemporad grounds her poetic quest

⁸⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poesia della Bemporad in Bemporad in Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, II vols., I, (Milano: Mondadori, 1999), pp. 294-297.

⁸⁷ Pagnanelli, p. 212.

⁸⁸ Pagnanelli, p. 213.

⁸⁹ Andrea Zanzotto, *Dalla trascrizione della trasmissione radiofonica "Giovanna Bemporad e Alda Merini. Conversazione con Andrea Zanzotto" Radio Lugana, 1980*, now in Giovanna Bemporad, *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi* (Milan: Archivio Dedalus, 2010), pp. 205-206.

in a state of endless interrogation of her themes, almost in an attempt to defy the temporal dimension. In light of this, assessing the influence exerted by Sophocles' *Electra* on Bemporad's *Diari* and evaluating the origin of her poetic themes is key to our understanding of her lyrical discourse. The opening poem of the *Diari* section, *Preludio*, contains already the majority of Bemporad's key themes and it opens a series of ten poems revolving around the concept of death:⁹⁰

Per mille e mille autunni sia guanciaie
la terra alle mie palpebre socchiuse
non più gravate da un presagio d'ombra;

non disfiolata e smorta la mia bocca
e agli angoli cadente, già sforzata
da spasimi e sorrisi, sembri assorta

nel sepolcro in preludi d'orazioni;
e non scolpita immortalmemente vegli
la mia maschera, chiusa in un cristallo.⁹¹

The poem investigates the presence of a shadow (*presagio d'ombra*) - *ombra* is the thematic word of the entire section - set in a space confined by eternity and ambiguous laughter (*spasimi e sorrisi*). The eternal repetition of a situation (*per mille e mille autunni*) - already metaphorically suggesting a condition resembling death - contributes to defy the dimension of time. As a result, the overall atmosphere of the poem appears to be that of an atemporal immobility of the poetic Self, introduced at the end of the poem by the image of a mask (*la mia maschera / chiusa in un cristallo*). The presence of Death is introduced by the words 'ombra', 'smorta', 'assorta', 'sepolcro' and 'immortalmente'. Analogues of Death,

⁹⁰ Bemporad herself commented on the nature and content of these poems in the video-interview *A una forma sorella*, p. 43: "Di color grigio nero, poi, invece, vengono quelle poesie, più o meno derivate dalle traduzioni che io facevo dei poeti simbolisti e sono, in genere, poesie d'amore, dove ho fatto entrare i colori della natura e del mondo circostante, mentre nelle prime (i *Diari*), non faccio altro che parlare della morte." Andrea Cirolla, in the preface to *A una forma sorella*, p. 10, also stresses the presence of death in the *Diari*: "L'idea della morte copre tutto il "libero magistero" casarsese, e sarà del resto il Leitmotiv anche dei "Diari" che proprio in quei mesi la Bemporad andava componendo, e che finiranno stampati a Venezia negli *Esercizi* del 1948, prima tappa di un lungo percorso umano ed editoriale [...]."

⁹¹ Bemporad, *Esercizi*, p. 13.

such as Night and Sleep, are then embedded in such vocabulary as ‘guanciaie’ and ‘palpebre socchiuse’. The mask of the poetic Self and the litotic construction expressing the desire of death (*e non scolpita immortalmente vegli/ la mia maschera, chiusa in un cristallo*), contained in the final hendecasyllables, ends the composition recalling the atemporal condition of the poetic Self.⁹² After this initial poem, death continues to dominate on the entire section, along with the themes of nostalgia and lost youth. Death is pictured as leading to silence and intimacy through the passage of shadow in the third poem (*Mia compagna implacabile la morte/persuade a taciturne intimità/ per un tramite d’ombra e di silenzi*).⁹³ The poem *Variazione su tasto obbligato* (the fourth)⁹⁴, apparently breaks from the death theme to delve into the issue of *dolore* (*quando non amerò che il mio dolore*) in conjunction with the poetic Self’s dream of light (*come il sogno di un’alba*). In particular, the words *orma* and *inganni* can be read – I argue – as a reference to Electra’s recognition scene with her brother Orestes. The *orma* could recall the unknown footprint (*orma*) in Electra’s father’s burial place, which puzzles the Greek heroine. The word *inganni* could allude to the series of devices (to say it with Bemporad’s words “per inganni è morto e per inganni è tornato”) devised by Orestes to be able to return home. Together with these thematic words alluding to Electra’s story, the dreamy desire of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and the poetic Self’s emotional attachment to grief could be read as references to Electra’s painful condition. In the fifth poem (*Già comincia a segnare luci e ombre*), the

⁹² Bemporad connects the mask with a funereal symbolism in the *Video-ritratto*, p. 26: ‘Comunque, tornando all’immagine evocata in questa poesia: “e non scolpita immortalmente vegli/ la mia maschera chiusa in un cristallo” mi è stata suggerita mentre uscivo dalla casa di questo amico, una sera, ho visto sul plinto una riproduzione, un ritratto in cera probabilmente, di un suo antenato. [...] Sono rimasta stupita... per cui, poi, quando ho scritto questa poesia mi è tornata in mente quell’immagine, come qualcosa di funereo, che respingevo, “e non sul plinto immortalmente vegli/ la mia maschera chiusa in un cristallo”, perchè era chiusa nel vetro, mi ha fatto impressione, come un’immagine funebre e però immortale, cioè funebre per sempre, come se la mia testa fosse destinata a essere scolpita in cera e messa su un plinto per sempre. Mi ha fatto impressione, come una cosa negativa e l’ho messo nella poesia’.

⁹³ Bemporad, *Mia compagna implacabile la morte* in *Esercizi*, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Bemporad, *Variazione su tasto obbligato* in *Esercizi*, p. 20.

poetic Self wishes to die (*In così dolce sera/ non altro si vorrebbe che morire*).⁹⁵ The sixth (*Non soccorre all'eclissi vespertina*) pictures death through the metaphor of a ship sailing from riverbank to riverbank within the thematic presence of the shadow, in a crowd of shadows (*E un poco risentita va la bianca/ vela a smarrirsi in una selva d'ombre/malcerta di approdare a un'altra riva*).⁹⁶ The seventh poem (*Dolore, che mi seguiti immortale*) depicts pain as the eternal companion of humankind until death brings liberation (*Dolore, che mi seguiti immortale/ e indomabile fino al limitare/della morte, avrò gioia dagli spazi?*).⁹⁷ The eighth piece (*Non farmi così sola come il vento*) pictures a personification of death coming to establish a physical contact with the poetic persona (*E avrò più cara/ la morte se in un attimo, decisa,/ piano verrà, toccandomi una spalla*).⁹⁸ The ninth poem (*Vorrei gettare ciecamente al nulla*) portrays a simile between sleep and death and closes the thematic section of death (*l'intima oppressione/ si converte in sopore e cede all'afa/ che il mio pensiero dominante annulla/nel sonno non dissimile alla morte*).⁹⁹ The tenth poem, *Paesaggio*, as we have seen, is a declaration of poetics and opens a new series where the theme of death interlocks with those of memory and the image of the moon.¹⁰⁰ The image of the moon is developed in three poems as the elected confidante of the endlessly sad Self and a symbol of Light in the dark nights. A poem dedicated to Leopardi (*a Leopardi*) occupies the central position of this 'moon' triptych (the other two poems are: *Malinconica immagine su tutto* and *Nasce la luna come rossa aurora*) where death features as a vertiginous presence:

A Leopardi

La bianchissima luna alta è salita

⁹⁵ Bemporad, *Già comincia a segnare luci e ombre* in *Esercizi*, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Bemporad, *Non soccorre all'eclissi vespertina* in *Esercizi*, p. 22.

⁹⁷ Bemporad, *Dolore, che mi seguiti immortale* in *Esercizi*, p. 23.

⁹⁸ Bemporad, *Non farmi così sola come il vento* in *Esercizi*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ Bemporad, *Vorrei gettare ciecamente al nulla* in *Esercizi*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Bemporad, *Paesaggio* in *Esercizi*, p. 26.

dopo l'addio del giorno, a consolare
 alberi, campi e strade. Solitaria,
 con qualche primula sfiorita in mano,
 va una giovane bruna alla sua casa.
 L'aria è tutta armonia: sarebbe dolce
 svanire in questa immensità serena;
 batte a rintocchi lenti una campana,
 tra un poco d'erba io vedo spalancarsi
 la sepoltura. O vertigine d'ombre!
 La luna va calando all'orizzonte
 dove si perde la pianura, e dice
 che trapassare al nulla non è male.

The poem is an interesting mix of Leopardian and Sophoclean motifs. The image of a solitary girl returning to her house introduces the image of a grave (*io vedo spalancarsi/ la sepoltura*), which recall at one time Electra's desire for death and Leopardi's concluding lines of *A Silvia*.¹⁰¹ Five more poems interrogate the theme of death through an excursus on memory. The section ends with the poem titled *Epilogo*:

O vento che commemori passate
 moltitudini e fasti inceneriti,
 o tempo contro cui non c'è riparo:
 mi riduco al silenzio, nell'attesa

¹⁰¹ Several scholars noted the Leopardian echoes in Bemporad's original poetry. Carlo Izzo was the first to trace this influence. In a letter dated 8th of October 1941, p. 89, Izzo comments on Bemporad's *liriche*: 'La prima: "Te che nel grembo". Principio troppo foscoliano. Ucciderei i primi tre versi. "Verno" mi pare un' "anticaglia". Più sotto sostituirei "luce" a "lume". La fine è ottima. "Luna, ultima dea". L'intonazione leopardiana è innegabile'. In another letter dated 5th of November 1941, p. 106: 'Liriche. Speranza: molto leopardiana: "tali a noi rivela" "pallidi fiori ed erbe". Non è questione di atteggiamento spirituale, ma di musica'. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poesia della Bemporad* in *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), p. 295, mentioned Leopardi's influence as far as the hendecasyllable was concerned: 'Il *pastiche* che nasce da un contatto di una poesia folkloristica, e appartenente a un folclore di molti secoli fa e di un ambiente totalmente diverso dal nostro, con un endecasillabo Petrarca-Tasso-Leopardi (e Monti) riesce quanto mai succoso e suggestivo, con certi suoi toni magico-esoterici, che danno una vocale larghezza all'invocazione ingenua'. Giacinto Spagnoletti, *Dal risvolto di copertina di Esercizi 1980*, now in Giovanna Bemporad, *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi* (Milan: Archivio Dedalus, 2010), p. 203: '[...] dalla lirica degli *Esercizi* e che ritroviamo, proprio al colmo della stagione ermetica, quasi dimentica di prendere le distanze, impavida nel ricercare il cuore della nostra creazione poetica (Leopardi innanzitutto), ferma al crocicchio donde partono le grandi arterie del Simbolismo europeo'. Emanuele Trevi, *Giovanna Bemporad: l'Odissea di Omero*, in «Nuovi Argomenti», 46, 1993, now in Giovanna Bemporad, *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi*, p. 220: 'Quello che si legge nella filigrana degli *Esercizi* è un leopardismo integrale, si direbbe "di natura", per opporlo a quel prolisso leopardismo ideologico, di fattura eminentemente cardarelliana, che per molto tempo è stato davvero la malattia infantile del Novecento poetico italiano. Nella Bemporad il ricorso a Leopardi si dà con l'urgenza di un gesto vitale ma certo non premeditato, come il respiro nel sonno. Anche dove questo gesto possa assumere l'aspetto di un vero e proprio mosaico di citazioni, peraltro apertamente confessato con la dedica a *Leopardi* [...] Perché, insomma, Leopardi è qui davvero un maestro di sensibilità più che un serbatoio retorico, e i *Canti* possono venire utilizzati come la chiave d'accesso a quel mondo intimo e segreto che non conosciamo meglio degli altri solo perché ne siamo i depositari'.

purissima dell'ombra che già stende
 sui vivi un limbo della notte eterna.
 Forse è quest'ombra tragica sospesa
 sul ciglio della notte che fa illusi
 gli uomini di conoscersi e amarsi
 naufraghi nel silenzio dei millenni.¹⁰²

The two vocatives at the beginning of the poem recall Electra and her lament over past events. The pure act of waiting for shadow (*attesa purissima dell'ombra*) is a symbolic anticipation of death, expressed by the analogue of eternal Night (*notte eterna*). The thematic word of the entire section (*ombra*) is then paired with an adjective (*tragica*) which alludes directly to Greek tragedy. It is the “ombra tragica” which keeps humankind, with its mortality, on the edge of darkness and gives it the illusion of some knowledge and love. It would be hard not to recognize Sophocles’ influence in this passage, the solitude of his heroes always on the edge of ultimate despair and darkness. Death, suffering, misfortune and vain fate fill Bemporad’s poetic imagination in this first section of the *Esercizi*. To these themes Bemporad adds the Leopardian themes of lost youth, memory and nostalgia. The ambiguous laughter, another thematic presence of the *Diari* always featuring in connection with a female figure, alludes to the painful stages of solitude and hostility experienced by Electra throughout the play. Time, another theme dominating Electra’s condition, becomes fundamental in Bemporad’s poetry. Just as Electra cannot recognize the paedagogus nor Orestes because too much time has passed and she has lost perception of time, so Bemporad’s poetic Self appears crystallised in a timeless mask.

The tragic space of Elettra’s lament, her nightly wakening spent in endless lament, life as deprivation (and therefore difference) from the very beginning are all to be read as metaphors for Bemporad’ poetic Self. The entire section of the *Diari* can be read as a variation on the Electra theme. If Leopardi’s discovery of the ancients shaped his *poetica*

¹⁰² Bemporad, *Esercizi*, p. 35.

della ricordanza,¹⁰³ Bemporad's encounter with Greek tragedy prompted the formalization of a poetics of death. Her investigation of the frail fate of the human being results in an endless lament merging with a desire for death. The *nuit obscure* of the tragic hero is Bemporad's permanent poetic condition. From this space she explores the theme of abandonment (often shaped in the image of a lost youth), and that of desire for emptiness. Her lament moves from poem after poem, finding in poetry the only solace possible: the reunion with her *forma sorella*, of which the reunion between Orestes and Electra is a parallel. This union will be celebrated by a later poem titled *Forma sorella* (in the section *Esercizi*), which Bemporad herself described as one of the most important of her poetic collection:

da una stampa cinese

Non si svela il mio astro che alle risa
dei tuoi occhi, azalea, forma sorella
splendente come giada, che ti specchi
nel ruscello di seta e il piede esiguo
chiuso in conchiglia d'ostrica vi immergi.

La gioia m'incorona, o il mio pensiero
sopra il filo translucido dei sogni
si distende e s'allevia come un cirro
se coi draghi di bronzo e i liocorni
dei tuoi capelli scherzo un po' sdegnosa?

Strofina il fianco contro la tua spalla
la mia sete d'amore: grande bestia
che si allunga sul tuo collo e accarezza
la tua guancia con cadenza di sonno,
con la marea della notte negli occhi.¹⁰⁴

The negative particle 'Non' as the first word of the poem anticipates the presence of the Night (*la marea della notte*) and of Sleep (*cadenza di sonno*), at the end of the composition, thus enclosing the entire text in the Death dimension. Water (*ruscello di seta*) as the poetic process, is where the *forma sorella* – Bemporad's poetic persona – mirrors

¹⁰³ D'intino, XLIV.

¹⁰⁴ Bemporad, *Esercizi*, p. 57.

herself (*ti specchi* is also reminiscent of Foscolo's sonnet to Zacinto) and dives in (*immergi*). The *piede esiguo chiuso* is the means through which this immersion can take place. It alludes to the metrical and rhythmic aspect, recalled through the Classical terminology of the 'piede', of the poetic process. The first poetic unit pictures Bemporad's access to her poetic Self. This passage is mediated through the reflection of the poetic persona in the practice of poetry (symbolised by water) and the active development of the poetic word is made possible by metrics (*il piede esiguo /chiuso in conchiglia d'ostrica vi immergi*). The second and third units of the composition describe the dialogue between the poetic Self and poetry as a dance. The use of verbs expressing physicality such as 'si distende', 'strofina', 'si allunga', 'accarezza' create dynamic images. Towards the end of the poem the 'sete d'amore' as 'grande bestia' identifies Bemporad's origin of her poetic drive. This "thirst for love" is always experienced through the Night, as the last line informs us.¹⁰⁵ The reconciliation of the element of desire with that of Night as the fundamental components of this identity echoes Electra's tragic condition and shows the impact that this figure had on Bemporad's poetic imagination.

Virginia Woolf in the essay *On not knowing Greek* identified tragic sadness as a crucial trait of the Greek culture and language:

With the sound of the sea in their ears, vines, meadows, rivulets about them, they are even more aware than we are of a ruthless fate. There is a sadness at the back of life which they do not attempt to mitigate. Entirely aware of their own standing in the shadow, and yet alive to every tremor and gleam of existence, there they endure, and it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age.¹⁰⁶

The acceptance of a 'ruthless fate', the 'awareness of standing in the shadow', the unmitigated 'sadness' are constituent traits of Bemporad's poetic universe and the origin of her poetic enquiry.

¹⁰⁵ This is the "vuoto d'amore" mentioned by Pasolini in his review in the *Esercizi*, p. 294.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Woolf, *On not knowing Greek* in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 38.

Translating Greek tragedy profoundly influenced Bemporad's work. Particularly, the poetic translation of Sophocles' *Electra* exerted significant influence on her poetic quest. Her interpretative engagement (as is obvious from her metrical research) and her translation approach (influenced by Leopardi's ideas on the poetic translation from the Classics) are to be understood as 'experiences' through which she develops her poetic voice. The influence exerted by Sophocles' *Electra* on Bemporad's opus goes beyond the selection of poetic cores highlighted by the diachronic perspective. The translation of Greek tragedy enabled her to find her poetic voice and to express it in the 'forma sorella' of the *Esercizi*. The vast and tragic presence of death, the sadness of humankind, the everlasting strength of poetry as a necessity are structural to Bemporad's poetic universe. Russi reflecting on Bemporad's life and on her work stressed the presence of 'un'antica, coraggiosa dignità'.¹⁰⁷ This *antica, coraggiosa dignità* is the vestige of a far more structured appropriation of the Classical legacy. The figure of *Electra* is, for Bemporad, a poetic paradigm where antiquity and the dimension of an endless lament merge to enliven the necessity of poetry.

¹⁰⁷ Russi, *Esercizi di assoluto*, p. 81.

Chapter 4

Poetry and pedagogy in Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad: “Chi espone la propria verità ragionandola, insegna, e viceversa”¹

1.0. The pedagogy of two unconventional students: Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad as teachers of Classics

Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad’s relationship with Greco-Roman literature was chiefly expressed in their poetic translations of Greek tragedy. Their involvement with Greek tragedy is indeed part of a wider and much more articulated discourse on the classics. Sbarbaro and Bemporad not only extensively translated works of classical literature, but also taught classics in schools and as private tutors. Their teaching experience began in the period in which they translated Greek tragedy. In Sbarbaro’s case, there is evidence that he taught Sophocles’ *Antigone* at a state school in Genoa. As far as Bemporad is concerned, the dates of her manuscripts show that she translated Greek tragedy at roughly the time when she taught Greek in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s school in Friuli. This being the case, we might expect that Greek tragedy was also the subject of her lessons, although no record of the content of her lessons has been found so far.

Through the study of Sbarbaro’s and Bemporad’s experiences as teachers of Greek and Latin, this chapter aims to offer a perspective on their engagement with the Classical legacy complementing their translation activity. Their teaching, which involved continuous study and rereading of Greek and Latin texts, provided the stimulus for many of their poetic translations.

Sbarbaro and Bemporad had very different teaching experiences. Yet, their relationship with teaching and their pedagogic approach are informed by similar ideas. An account of their teaching careers based on historical evidence will help us to appreciate these differences and analogies. Their reflections on teaching and on learning *per se* reveal

¹ Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia dello spirito Tedesco nelle memorie d’un contemporaneo* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), p. 55.

the most palpable dissimilarity. Sbarbaro devoted significant attention to this aspect. His prose collections and his letters present many passages on the role of education and on his pedagogic methodology, often in connection with his thoughts on translation. Bemporad, however, made no explicit references in her creative work to her experience as a teacher of classics. If we exclude her scant remarks in a memorial piece for Pasolini, the sources for her teaching experience are limited to Pasolini's biographers who quote Bemporad among the friends who came to teach in Friuli. Yet, Bemporad's silence about this experience should not induce us to think that teaching Classics was meaningless for her. Thanks to Pasolini's biographers, it is possible to form an idea of the kind of teacher that Bemporad was. Her charismatic approach to teaching and her methodology based solely on a performative reading of her translations, followed by an oral commentary,² anticipate, in a sense, the performativity of her public readings of her poetic translations of Homer's *Odyssey*. This aspect of teaching creates a solid connection between her translation, interpretation and performance of the classics. In addition, Bemporad was not only a teacher of Classics in Pasolini's school, but was herself one of Pasolini's pupils. For personal reasons she abandoned school at a very early stage, thus making herself into a complete autodidact. Bemporad would spend part of the day as a teacher, and the rest in long conversations with Pasolini. Their strong friendship also served as that amicable component that Pasolini believed essential to a successful learning environment.

Sbarbaro and Bemporad both developed a pedagogy in which the classical languages were the enlivening centre, capable of awakening a new wave of *umanesimo*. Pasolini, in his school, was attempting to change the cultural and social canons in the direction of what Andrea Zanzotto called a *pedagogia apedagogica*. By creating an atmosphere of persuasion, charisma and intellectual challenge, and by using the Classics, these unconventional

² Enzo Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1979), p. 84, offers a concrete example of Bemporad's performative readings / lessons at Pier Paolo Pasolini's independent school.

teachers aimed at letting the learning experience unfold as a real event in the student's life, through which the individual developed his/her independent thought by gradually discovering his/her real object of interest. I should like to argue that also Sbarbaro and Bemporad, with a different degree of theoretical awareness, were putting into practice the *pedagogia apedagogica*.

Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's teaching experience also sheds light on the nature of their socio-political agenda, that is on the ways in which their translations of the classics respond to contemporary historical events, commenting on ethics and politics. I am convinced that Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's ethical and political engagement is not to be looked for in their choice of translating Greek tragedy during the years of Fascism nor in hidden references in their poetic versions of Sophocles' tragedy. It is their commitment to education and their use of the classics that first of all must be considered if we are to understand their *impegno* during this historical period. Both poets aimed at reshaping the role and the function of education through an innovative teaching methodology. The triad Classics, translation and poetry is the cornerstone of their teaching. Their interest in Greco-Roman poetry, so far explored through the filter of their poetic translations of Greek tragedy, has therefore to be assessed in light of their pedagogical commitment. The classics are not only a source of personal poetic inspiration, but also a means of reasserting the vital role of poetry in education.

2.0 Camillo Sbarbaro as a teacher of Greek and Latin: "Del greco non so l'alfabeto"

Camillo Sbarbaro started his teaching activity by invitation from an established philosopher and pedagogue, Adelchi Baratono (1875-1947). Baratono had been Sbarbaro's professor of philosophy at the Liceo Classico (from 1905 to 1908) and afterwards became a close family friend. In 1919 Baratono asked the poet to tutor a mature student who needed help with

Greek and Latin. The student, Luxardo Lelio di Costante, was a migrant recently returned to Italy from America. Lelio di Costante wanted to graduate in Literature and Philosophy at the University of Genoa, but had no knowledge of Greek and Latin and was therefore in need of private tutoring.³ This is the beginning of Sbarbaro's career as a teacher. Clelia Sbarbaro, the poet's sister, recalled this episode in her biographical notes:

Tornò alla vita civile con i nervi a pezzi e per qualche tempo fu sordo e cieco a quanto gli accadeva intorno, cupamente chiuso in sè. Dell'impiego si liberò subito con un pretesto, rifiutò occupazioni che prima avrebbe gradite. Gli pesava la vita in famiglia e ostentava questo disagio; restava fuori casa quasi ogni notte in compagnia di nottambuli capeggiati da....[...] Questo stato di cose, che durò alcuni mesi, fu troncato di colpo da una delle sue impensate decisioni: accettò la proposta fattagli dal professor Adelchi Baratono, di portare alla laurea in lettere un non più giovane italo-americano del tutto impreparato in latino e greco. L'impegno non era da poco, ma è probabile che a deciderlo fossero proprio le difficoltà; non si diede tregua finché l'allievo non ebbe la sua laurea ('Scampoli', Vallecchi, p. 86); e dalla lunga fatica uscì un Camillo nuovo, liberato dagli orrori visti in guerra, tornato in pace con sé.⁴

Entitled *Camillo Sbarbaro nei ricordi della sorella* (1970), these notes (six pages in length) offer a concise summary of Sbarbaro's life. In particular, this brief excerpt captures a period of the poet's life that is relevant to our investigation. After the poet had returned from war, it appears that he was suffering from depression. He resigned from his job at the Ilva ironworks and began a way of life that will later be labelled a period *maudit*.⁵ Gina Lagorio, who researched this period of Sbarbaro's life, informs us that Clelia confessed her preoccupation to Baratono, hoping that he would find a way to help her brother:

E Lina sfogò la sua angoscia con Adelchi Baratono, degli amici il più sollecito di attenzioni anche verso di lei; Baratono colse allora un'occasione che gli si era presentata provvidenzialmente proprio in quei giorni: era venuto da lui a chiedere consiglio un certo Luxardo, un italiano emigrato in America e ora, quarantunenne e padrone di un solido patrimonio, rientrato in Italia e deciso a laurearsi. Il latino e il greco erano lo scoglio più arduo per lui da superare; l'impresa, che era tutt'altro che semplice, fu prospettata dal professor

*Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia dello spirito Tedesco nelle memorie d'un contemporaneo* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), p. 55.

³ Paolo Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2005), pp. 29-30 traced the student's name in the records of the University of Genoa: "Nell'annuario della Regia Università di Genova, «Luxardo Lelio di Costante da Buenos Ayres» risulta, al n. 18 del 4 anno, tra gli *Studenti iscritti nell'Anno Scolastico 1921-1922* per la Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia."

⁴ Clelia Sbarbaro, *Camillo Sbarbaro nei ricordi della sorella* in *Paragone*, XXI, 248, 1970, pp. 130-136 (132).

⁵ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*, p. 28.

Baratono a Sbarbaro, quasi con carattere di perentorietà: «Solo tu, gli disse, puoi riuscirci.» Sbarbaro, fosse il rispetto che da sempre nutriva per il maestro la cui autorità sentiva come naturale diritto — una prosecuzione forse di quella paterna, accettò. E cominciò la sua opera di recupero delle lingue classiche. [...] Il poeta riprese a vedere gli amici di un tempo, quelli da guardare negli occhi alla luce del giorno, e fece nuovi incontri, primo fra tutti quello con Oscar e Fausto Saccarotti, che divennero assidui della casa di Via Montaldo. [...] È Barile che ricorda questa stagione durante la quale Sbarbaro, ancora ai primi passi della rimonta psicologica, era assorbito completamente dalla sua lotta con il latino e il greco: lotta in senso letterale, della sua volontà di vita contro la tentazione di morte che l'aveva portato sino alle soglie dell'annientamento.⁶

Both Lagorio and Clelia Sbarbaro noted the difficulty involved in this first teaching assignment. Lagorio commented, “*l’impresa, che era tutt’altro che semplice*”, and Clelia Sbarbaro underlined that “*L’impegno non era da poco, ma è probabile che a deciderlo fossero proprio le difficoltà*”. It will be useful to look more closely at the difficulty involved in this first tutoring experience. As we will see from other sources, the more problematic the student’s situation, the more interested Sbarbaro appeared to be. Lagorio and Clelia Sbarbaro both imply that teaching had a therapeutic effect on the poet’s mental health. The poet’s sister underlines how the intense teaching commitment coincided with the poet’s mental recovery (*e dalla lunga fatica uscì un Camillo nuovo, liberato dagli orrori visti in guerra, tornato in pace con sé*). Lagorio pushes the argument to the next level by reading the teaching activity metaphorically. Once he accepted the student, Sbarbaro had to refresh his knowledge of Greek and Latin because he had not been using these languages since high school. According to Lagorio’s reading, revising his knowledge of grammar became (*e cominciò la sua opera di recupero delle lingue classiche*) an act of will-power, which played against the sense of annihilation caused by his depression. Sbarbaro’s resolute study of Greek and Latin became symbolic of his determination to bring back his desire for life, counterbalancing his death wish. Lagorio offers another precious insight into this period:

Rientrato a Genova, Sbarbaro continua il lavoro cominciato e che sarà più suo, il modo di guadagnare che gli piacerà meno e che eserciterà più a lungo, fino alla vecchiaia: a Luxardo, l’italo-americano che conseguì onorevolmente la sua laurea con il prof. Cerrato, si affiancano

⁶ Gina Lagorio, *L’insegnamento in Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere* (Milan: Garzanti, 1981), p. 160.

altri scolari, mandati da Adelchi Baratono, o figli di amici, e altri che vennero dietro il racconto entusiasta dei primi. Sbarbaro dà lezioni di latino e di greco; a un solo scolaro per volta.⁷

The word spread and Sbarbaro's soon became the teacher of "impossible cases". More importantly, the passage tells us about an important methodological assumption: Sbarbaro tutored one student at a time. This preference also helps us to understand why Sbarbaro did not want to become a schoolteacher. A decision he made after teaching in two schools. The poet spent the academic years 1925-1926 and 1926-1927, at the *Istituto Calsanzio* in Cornigliano teaching Greek and Italian. In 1927 he took up a teaching post at the *Istituto Arecco* in Genoa.⁸ Carlo Bo, then a student at the *Istituto Arecco*, had Sbarbaro as a teacher of Greek, an experience that changed his life, as he recalled later:

Ho conosciuto Camillo Sbarbaro nel 1928, per la verità ho conosciuto prima lo Sbarbaro che insegnava greco e poi a distanza di qualche mese lo scrittore: avevo infatti notato nelle vetrine dei librai *Liquidazione*, lo avevo acquistato per vedere che rapporto ci fosse tra il professore e lo scrittore e ebbi la sorpresa di trovarmi di fronte – forse per la prima volta - a un testo sconvolgente ed esemplare. [...] Lo Sbarbaro che conosciamo comincia ad essere se stesso dopo i tentativi fatti per stare al giuoco degli altri, dopo il tempo degli impieghi e la parentesi militare – dove peraltro risalta la sua fedeltà al dato del dovere e del sacrificio -, comincia quando decide di fare due cose al margine, due cose che non potremmo neanche chiamare mestieri: l'insegnante e il lichenista. Rappresentano sotto due luci diverse il costante ripetersi della sua prima contraddizione: il segno della fatica e quello del piacere. Ma sono anche questa volta contraddizioni che facciamo per nostro comodo, nel senso che Sbarbaro è stato un insegnante bravissimo, così come è stato un maestro della ricerca botanica. Caso mai, c'è un punto in comune in questi due atteggiamenti, c'è il rifiuto del professionismo, c'è il rispetto della sua prima scelta, quella di non rappresentare una parte ufficiale. Io sono in grado di portare sul primo punto una testimonianza diretta perchè ho avuto la fortuna di avere Sbarbaro come insegnante di greco, sia pure per pochi mesi: comunque, quel breve periodo è stato sufficiente per fornirmi dei dati che poi hanno soccorso la mia natura di lettore. Tanto per cominciare, Sbarbaro non era un professore né insegnava come un professore: era piuttosto un innovatore senza dirlo ma sicuro del proprio metodo che era poi quello della partecipazione, della comunicazione fra discente e docente. Leggeva in quell'anno 1928 che facevo la seconda liceo l'*Antigone* e la leggeva come si legge una notizia di cronaca su un giornale: parola per parola, quasi si trattasse di una traduzione interlineare, senza commenti estetici, senza riferimenti storici ma con appena qualche rapida e marginale notazione che doveva aiutare lo studente a non perdere il punto centrale della tragedia. Era un modo di lavorare umilissimo e che a qualche spettatore o uomo del mestiere avrebbe anche potuto apparire pedestre ma l'impegno del professor Sbarbaro era proprio quello di non aggiungere nulla che potesse distorcere il senso originale del testo, nulla che

⁷ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, p. 163.

⁸ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*, pp. 32-33.

suonasse come inutile amplificazione retorica. Anche da questo punto di vista per Sbarbaro contava soltanto il testo: non faceva sfoggio di scienza filologica che pure possedeva né – tanto meno – si richiamava alle estetiche di moda a quel tempo. Era un semplice lettore ma mi bastarono poche lezioni per sentire un fascino, per provare qualcosa che prima non avevo mai provato, vale a dire la bellezza della poesia. Quasi si fosse trattato di insegnarci a vedere uno spettacolo nuovo della natura, Sbarbaro era partito dalla parola, aveva cercato di renderla nella maniera più appropriata e diretta e poi aveva lasciato stare.⁹

The excerpt is the most extensive source that we have on Sbarbaro as a teacher. Bo's testimony is divided into two sections. In the first part, Bo underlines the crucial importance that teaching had in Sbarbaro's poetic life. According to his interpretation, Sbarbaro's poetic voice came into maturity after he decided to teach and to study lichens. The critic sees an illuminating analogy between these 'marginal' activities. By choosing to be a private tutor and an independent scholar of lichens, Sbarbaro made it clear that he had no desire to be associated with any official institution or any kind of professionalism. Bo's intuition is sound. As we will see, the traces of that pedagogical activity in Sbarbaro's opus confirm this hypothesis. The poet did not miss a single occasion to challenge the traditional idea of the teacher and the role of schools. Instead, he proposed empathy as the foundation of any possible intellectual advancement. After Bo pinpoints what is at the heart of teaching for Sbarbaro, he proceeds to describe one of Sbarbaro's lessons, thus giving us an insight into the practical reality of the poet's teaching. He points out that Sbarbaro could not have been labeled a standard teacher: he was, indeed, an innovator. The innovative feature of this method – *the metodo della partecipazione* – was confidently put into practice, almost as if Sbarbaro did not know how to teach otherwise. The method was based on initiating a communication between the *discente* (literally, the learner) and the *docente* (the teacher). Everything was subordinate to this privileged means of communication between the two. Bo's testimony offers a detailed description of Sbarbaro's typical lesson. They translated Sophocles' *Antigone* in class: Sbarbaro read the tragedy by giving an almost interlinear

⁹ Carlo Bo, *Com'era Sbarbaro* in *Atti del convegno nazionale di studi su Camillo Sbarbaro (Spotorno 6-7 Ottobre 1973)* ed. by A. Guerrini (Genoa-Spotorno, Resine-Centro Studi Camillo Sbarbaro, 1974), pp. 10-11.

translation. The aim of this kind translation was to avoid any kind of commentary or literary criticism, letting the bare Sophoclean word shine. The effects appeared to be extremely positive, at least in Bo's case: the pupil was fascinated by the poetic word. Sbarbaro's goal was to divest the text from all the secondary apparatuses (commentaries, schools of thoughts, interpretations).

Sbarbaro's relationship with the students comes up in two other sources. The first is the *Testimonianza per Camillo Sbarbaro* by Angelo Barile, one of Sbarbaro's close friends from high school:

Alla scuola, quando poi vi tornò, vi tornò per insegnare seriamente imparato da sè a tu per tu con i testi: senz'altro titolo che la conoscenza e l'amore della materia. Fino a questi ultimi anni Sbarbaro si è aiutato a vivere traducendo e dando lezioni di latino e greco (il prediletto suo greco). Non dico del lavoro di traduttore, ma quello delle lezioni non è stato propriamente per lui un lavoro, tanto lo ha sempre fatto di suo genio. Fatica senza fatica. Il suo impegno, il suo scrupolo era solo eguagliato dal piacere che provava e che partecipava vivamente agli allievi. Non ho mai assistito a una sua lezione e non so come avvenisse questo mezzo miracolo d'incantare i ragazzi insegnando grammatica. Ma certo vi aveva parte quella umana intelligenza e bontà che forse nella sua poesia non è confessata abbastanza.¹⁰

It is unfortunate Barile could not witness any "lezione". Still, like Bo, he stresses that the relationship between Sbarbaro and the student was at the heart of his teaching approach.

The second reference is to be found in a passage of Sbarbaro's *Fuochi fatui* (1956):

Quando m'avvien di dire che a insegnare mi animo e né lo scolaro né io avvertiamo il passare del tempo. Se chi ode è un insegnante, mi oppone un viso opaco o apertamente beffardo: a chi vuol darla a bere? Che tutte le volte si tratti di uno di quei sfortunati che in classe cavano ogni momento l'orologio?¹¹

Sbarbaro's teaching practice could not have been pictured more memorably. He draws a subtle, yet very defined, line between teaching and being a professional schoolteacher. For him, *insegnare* (to teach) is one with *animarsi* (to cheer up): teaching lifts up his spirit, time is forgotten. It seems as if he were speaking about the ecstasies of love. Sbarbaro fastidiously avoids applying the noun *insegnante* to himself. As is obvious from this

¹⁰ Angelo Barile, *Testimonianza per Camillo Sbarbaro* in «Il Letimbro», n. 34, 1978, p.3.

¹¹ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, p. 475.

passage, he by no means wants to be included in the category of professional teachers. He goes as far as to imagine a professional teacher responding with sarcastic incredulity to his enjoyment, and concludes that this must be one of those who keep checking the time.

After this detailed description, Bo states that one day, Sbarbaro suddenly disappeared. As one reads in Lagorio's book *Un modo spoglio di esistere*,¹² Sbarbaro did leave the *Istituto Arecco* in Genoa in January 1928. Lagorio presents us with two reasons for Sbarbaro's sudden decision to abandon the school. The first is an historical one:

L'anno scolastico 1927/1928 non fu portato a termine da Sbarbaro: un giorno il professore di greco non comparve, né si vide più. [...] Il motivo è semplice e si può spiegare in una sola parola: fascismo.¹³

In January all the professors at the *Istituto Arecco* were offered *la tessera fascista*. Sbarbaro rejected the affiliation and left the job. The following day a medical certificate arrived at the school, declaring Sbarbaro was unfit to teach because of heart problems. This is to be understood, according to Lagorio, as the formal reason for the poet's departure. However, beyond Sbarbaro's repulsion for the Fascist regime, the *tessera fascista* offered the poet the opportunity to resign from a job he could no longer enjoy:

[...] Quando il Padre Rettore comunicò al professore di Greco che aveva avviato la pratica per fargli avere la tessera del Fascio, e con un elaborato discorso, pausato da pesanti silenzi mai interrotti da Sbarbaro, lo esortò a firmare la domanda che il giorno successivo gli avrebbe sottoposto, pena la rinuncia all'incarico, il poeta dovette sopportare con sollievo all'ineluttabilità di tale rinuncia. Il lavoro, va detto, qualunque fosse, non sorrise mai a Sbarbaro, anche se una volta accettato, fu da lui esercitato con scrupolo [...] all'insegnamento pubblico s'era adattato per le necessità della vita, ma gli preferiva il rapporto con un solo scolaro.¹⁴

The poet remained a private tutor of Greek and Latin for the rest of his life. His decision to leave school helps us to appreciate all the more profoundly his pedagogical ideas and how

¹² Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere* (Milan: Garzanti, 1981) is the extended version of Gina Lagorio, *Sbarbaro controcorrente* (Parma: Guanda, 1973).

¹³ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, p. 163.

¹⁴ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esistere*, p. 164.

these influenced his poetic and personal life. In a telling passage of *Fuochi fatui* - the poet's only testimony from this time - he presents his colleague, Ettore Maestroni, at the Istituto Calsanzio, as the perfect antinomy of what he, Sbarbaro, believed in, and did, as a teacher:

Dove sei, che è di te, Ettore Maestroni? A dispetto dell'accrescitivo da cattedra universitario, m'era collega in uno di quegli istituti dove, per motivi di economia, all'insegnante non si chiede la laurea. [...] Amabile uomo; ma, anche per me, avvistarlo per strada era tentare la fuga. Acchiappato t'inchiodava tra le spinte della folla all'orlo d'un marciapiede e, alzata la manina didattica, dava il via al suo dire; inutile protestare urgenze, non avevi scampo. [...] Con questa disposizione a ascoltarsi, in cattedra trionfava. Non contento di riempir l'aula della voce, teneva l'uscio aperto per darle maggior risonanza; pronto a calarsi di lassù per venire su quei trampoli a spalancarlo se, avveniva spesso, chi passava nel corridoio s'attentava a chiuderlo. Pubblicità che suonava sfida ai colleghi: facessero lo stesso se si sentivano; i quali in ritorsione insinuavano che in classe parlava sempre lui per garantirsi da domande che lo mettessero in imbarazzo; lasciando così intendere che, per ostentarlo tanto, di ciò che insegnava non doveva essere troppo sicuro. Vero è che non interrogava mai; se nell'ebbrezza del porgere una domanda gli sfuggiva, era retorica: s'affrettava lui a risponderti. Come su quell'onda canora, si teneva a galla sulle apparenze; oltre, si guardava da andare per non compromettere l'equilibrio instabile di un generico ottimismo; mai, a esempio, avrebbe messo gli occhi, confessava, su una tavola anatomica. Credente, specie in vista del Paradiso, di questo si prendeva di qua l'acconto che poteva; ma poche distrazioni concedendogli il fisico disgraziato, il più del tempo aveva bisogno per non affondare qualcosa d'esterno cui afferrarsi: quella specie di bel canto che, difendendolo dagli abboccamenti con se stesso, gli consentiva l'alibi della giovialità di facciata. Bisogno così vitale, si vedeva, da far pensare che all'insegnamento si fosse dato per soddisfarlo. E infatti... A metà anno fu sostituito; nel suo modo di far lezione i Padri avevano visto la causa del nessun profitto della scolaresca. Accolse il brusco licenziamento come se lo aspettasse; non doveva essere la prima volta che gli capitava; e riparò al paese, sapendo che per lo smacco e l'inasprirsi dell'artrite non ne sarebbe più uscito. Nella circostanza gli fu vicino un collega che gli somigliava; anche questi si teneva su con le parole e, meno innocente, con quelle che presumono di durare. L'altro lo rassicurò: al paese, qualcosa possedeva; che lo impauriva, disse, era lassù la difficoltà di *comunicare*; e, intendeva, di trovare udienza.¹⁵

The passage, one of the many satirical descriptions in Sbarbaro's *Fuochi Fatui*, offers a valuable insight into the poet's ideas about schools and teachers. His colleague Ettore Maestroni argues powerfully for Sbarbaro's strong disagreement with the rhetoric of bombastic teaching. The comically pompous incipit sets the tone for the entire passage, which critiques the uselessness of posturing in pedagogy. The surname is already a caricature, *Maestroni* namely "big teacher". Sbarbaro underlines that such an enhancement in the name (*accrescitivo da cattedra universitaria*) - as if University lecturers should have

¹⁵ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 488-489.

a more pompous name than schoolteachers - in complete contrast with the humble school. The *Istituto Calsanzio* was one of those schools where, for economic reasons, the teachers were not required to hold a degree in order to teach. Sbarbaro uses this information in two ways. Firstly, it underlines the fact that he does not have a degree and that he is a schoolteacher purely because of occasional and randomly favorable circumstances. Secondly, it helps him to build an ironically bittersweet portrayal of Ettore Maestroni. What Sbarbaro presents in this passage is the caricature of the institutional notion of a teacher. Not only does he dismiss any kind of social prestige attached to the profession, but he also ridicules those teachers who believed in it and allowed it to become an important aspect of their role. Maestroni literally functions as a negative model. However, behind the ironic description of his colleague it is possible to find room for empathy and humanity, which are the reasons why Sbarbaro decided, after all, to include this passage in his collection. Towards the end, we can see how Sbarbaro found in Maestroni's way of teaching the innocent desire to find solace in words. This aspect must have been resonant with Sbarbaro's own poetics, as Lagorio points out:

E forse di Maestroni scrisse proprio perchè, al di là di ogni ironia, la sua umanità lo faceva pietoso verso il pover'uomo, che «si teneva su con le parole»: Sbarbaro parla di sé quando racconta che «nella circostanza gli fu vicino un collega che gli somigliava; anche questi si teneva su con le parole e, meno innocente, con quelle che presumono di durare». Il poeta ironizza su Maestroni per ironizzare su se stesso: anch'egli ancorato a parole che nascevano nel silenzio tuttavia, mentre l'esercizio della lezione cattedratica, di fronte a una scolaresca eterogenea e svogliata, lo costringeva a una violenza su di sé non lieve: vincere la sua timidezza innanzitutto, a parlare a molti, mentre il dialogo fioriva per lui solo nell'aria familiare dell'amicizia, ad alzare il tono, essendogli invece congeniale solo il «sottovoce», e il «pianissimo».¹⁶

Lagorio also makes us aware of the fact that the *Istituto Calsanzio* was not as modest as Sbarbaro's testimony suggests:

L'Istituto di Cornigliano era tra queste [i.e. scuole private] vantando ottimi maestri, forniti

¹⁶ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esisterere*, p. 159.

oltrechè di dottrina, di laurea; oppure la modestia solita fa tacere a Sbarbaro che se gli fu affidato dai Padri il difficile compito di insegnare in liceo senza laurea, fu perchè ormai la sua fama di «taumaturgo» nei confronti degli scolari ritenuti «irrecuperabili» in Greco si era diffusa, nella esigua cerchia che mandava in quel primo Novecento i figli al liceo [...] Ormai i professori di greco genovesi, quando avevano «un caso» grave, ricorrevano a Sbarbaro, il cui nome si era nel frattempo diffuso anche per la collaborazione a «L’Azione».¹⁷

The poet’s sister, too, as we have just seen, underlined Sbarbaro’s ability to help the most difficult students. The poet’s preference for a one-to-one lesson also emerges from this overview. As the teacher of students considered *irrecuperabili*, Sbarbaro had the privilege of teaching out of preference. The one-to-one lesson gave him the chance of putting into practice that *metodo della partecipazione* where the poet found himself to be both teacher and student.

2.1 “Imparare si può solo da sé. Le scuole ci sono per chi insegna.” The essence of Sbarbaro’s pedagogy

Sbarbaro’s creative work reflects the deep and wide-ranging discourse on education thus underlining the interplay between poetry and pedagogy. The Ettore Maestroni sketch and the brief passage on the positive effects of teaching are only two of the numerous passages that highlight the poet’s views on learning. One has only to search his major prose collections: *Trucioli (1914-1918)* (1920, 1948, 1963²), *Fuochi Fatui* (1956, 1958², 1962), *Scampoli* (1960), *Cartoline in franchigia* (1966), *La trama delle lucciole: lettere a Angelo Barile (1919-1937)* (1979) and «*Trucioli*» *dispersi* (1986).

His thoughts on education can be divided into three kinds: Sbarbaro’s personal memories as a student, the irreverent recollections of his own teachers and his reflections on the role of school and teaching. These thoughts are interconnected with notations on translation of the classics. Indeed the correlation between translation, pedagogy and poetic voice is very close.

¹⁷ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro. Un modo spoglio di esisterere*, p. 158.

Following the chronological order, I should like to start by examining the poet's personal memories as a student. At the beginning of *Fuochi fatui*, Sbarbaro's last book, we read:

L'anno che nel passaggio alla seconda liceo fu consentito di scegliere tra il greco e la matematica, i condiscipoli che optarono per questa lessero sulla loro lavagna: «A noi le violette di Saffo, a voi un mazzolino di segmenti.»¹⁸

This memory appears in the opening pages of the book, immediately after the poetics, *Ars iners poetica*. Such vocabulary as *passaggio* and *condiscipoli* conveys a ritual dimension. 'A noi le violette di Saffo', a quote from Alcaeus, makes Sappho the symbol of the whole of Greek literature. The solemn atmosphere is mitigated by the ironic phrase 'a voi un mazzolino di segmenti', but the superiority of Greek over mathematics is stressed all the more forcefully by the extension of the botanical metaphor to the mathematical term 'segmenti'. In another passage of *Fuochi fatui*, the poet traces the origin of his passion for literature back to his 'ginnasio' days and informs us that he infected his schoolmates with it:

Ragazzo, raggranellavo i soldi e da Varazze andavo a piedi a Savona per acquistare magari «La signora Autari». In ginnasio della mia sete di letture contagiai i compagni; leggevamo quel che capitava, libri innocenti e proibiti alla rinfusa. Allarmato dall'estendersi dell'epidemia, il clero locale intervenne: il parroco bandì dal pulpito la crociata, il curato improvvisatosi braccio secolare entrò nelle case a sequestrar libri. Alla voce del pastore, il paese si sollevò; io fui additato come la pecora nera; le famiglie ci diedero la caccia, ci frugarono addosso, scovarono libri fin sotto i materassi. Aizzati dalla persecuzione, escogitammo per il corpo del reato, i nascondigli più imprevedibili. Il giovedì, giorno di vacanza, io lo passavo in un orto; rimuovendo da una muriccia di fascia certa pietra, ritiravo, involto da formiche, «Resurrezione» (che lessi sino in fondo con una costanza di cui sarei oggi incapace). La cosa arrivò al punto che il vescovo se ne interessò; disapprovata dall'alto, la persecuzione ebbe termine e con essa, nei miei compagni, la scarlattina.¹⁹

Sbarbaro recalls the supreme pleasure of reading Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrezione* during the holidays, alone in the vegetable garden, digging the book out of its hiding place. The pleasure of reading is empowered by prohibition. This episode shows that questioning authority is a fundamental spur to intellectual growth. The same idea can be found in a

¹⁸ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, p. 423.

¹⁹ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 438-439.

slightly different context:

Se leggi un autore, per quanto grande, a un giovane, non lodare tutto come fanno impunemente i chiosatori di Dante. Corri piuttosto censurando il rischio di sbagliarti. Solo così egli ti crederà quando esclamerai.²⁰

Sbarbaro here transfigures one of his memories as a student in order to provide an example for a correct and sincere reading of an author. Sbarbaro challenges the poetic authority of Dante as a means to awaken critical thinking in the student. The presence of censorship is here a completely different kind. Used in an antinomic relationship with the action of praising (*lodare*), Sbarbaro proposes to use censorship to show the student that authors, no matter how canonical, needs to be addressed with a critical attitude to fully appreciate their value. The example of the Dante scholars also serves as an anti-model for those who aim to kindle passion and trust in their students. From his memories as a student Sbarbaro derives a whole pedagogy. The poet still reasons as a student even while he must act as a teacher. Another memory of his school days is illuminating:

Ragazzo, finiti gli esami, cacciavo la testa sotto il rubinetto nella insensata speranza di cancellare sin la traccia di ciò che avevo studiato. Ma studiare, specie a quell'età, incide si vede il cervello di solchi come un disco. Non è molti anni, dormivo ancora sotto l'incubo d'un esame da dare e mi capitava di svegliarmi con sulle labra le parole: «Tiro da A una retta a ...». La lavagna era quella, orizzontale, del liceo e il problema che dimostravo, quello della perpendicolare a due sghembe.²¹

Sbarbaro codifies his school experience as shocking, its legacy as a nightmare. Education is symbolically described as a contamination that Sbarbaro desires to wash away thus showing early awareness that the school experience was for him a sort of violence. However, Sbarbaro's views on school are not entirely as catastrophic as it might appear from this fragment. Notwithstanding his unremitting criticism towards the school system, Sbarbaro

²⁰ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, p. 475.

²¹ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, p. 441-442.

was able to interact with positive models while a student. The poet's memories of his own teachers offer valuable insight into the poet's pedagogic ideas, showing his models and anti-models. The poet himself provides us with the names of his own teachers. Don Giacomo Gresino, his old professor of Greek, a priest, comes across as a very positive model. He appears in *Cartoline in Franchigia*, a book composed of letters written by Sbarbaro to his childhood friend Angelo Barile:

Le poesie. A Don Gresino (il salesiano che mi insegnò gli elementi di greco) per la stima che di lui conservo avevo mandato quella «a mio padre», pubblicata sulla *Riviera Ligure*. Mi scrive: «Se non ti offendi, ti dico schietto che da te mi aspettavo di molto meglio». Non per questo mi sto convincendo (e amaramente rallegrandomi) che i miei versi piaceranno a pochissimi.²²

Sbarbaro seems to trust Don Gresino's judgment. The fragment, composed with an almost illogical syntax, does not create a nexus of causality between Don Gresino's opinions and Sbarbaro's standpoint on the reception of his own poetry. Don Gresino is here pictured more as an occasion to reflect on his own poetry. Respect for the teacher's judgment, here shown by the poet's decision to send him the poem 'A mio padre', is then reinstated in another section of *Fuochi fatui*:

Vento, sole, appetito e neanche una parola di letteratura: mi sono rinfrescato l'anima. Ma ce l'ho con te e te lo dico subito. Le cosette che scrivo sono, questo è certo, il meglio di me. Ora, come sono difficile a far amicizia, anche più sono geloso di quello che scrivo; perciò appena te le ho lette, dimenticatene ti prego anche il titolo. Se no... Dal Beigua si vedeva il Monviso e il monte Rosa. Su un muretto ho scritto: *Montagne, amiche mie uniche, io sono / per la vita e la morte tutto vostro*. Buffone, ha commentato Don Gresino. A ragione.²³

Both passages show Sbarbaro's affection for his old professor of Greek. Lagorio stressed the importance of this relationship for Sbarbaro's approach to classical literature:

La brusca rudezza del prete, la sua cultura non manualistica, ma nutrita del contatto continuo coi classici, l'ampiezza degli interessi, lasciarono una traccia profonda in Sbarbaro: ne è la

²² Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 555-556.

²³ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, p. 549.

prova più sicura l'aver sottoposto a lui più tardi i suoi versi.²⁴

The importance of Don Gresino in Sbarbaro's relationship with classical literature is more than a 'traccia profonda'. It is a very precise influence: Don Gresino's continuous contact with the classics and his anti-academic approach modelled Sbarbaro's way of teaching. I would also suggest reading Sbarbaro's request for Don Gresino's approval for his poetic compositions in a symbolic way. By asking his old teacher of Greek to read his own poetry, Sbarbaro metaphorically asks the classics for poetic approval thus unveiling the creative spur that Sbarbaro assigned to the knowledge of classics. The interplay between Sbarbaro's poetic universe and his relationship with the classics filtered by education shows in another passage focussing on Don Gresino's personality. A piece entitled *Visita al collegio*, from the book *Scampoli* (1960), offers a detailed description of the priest which can help us to further appreciate this:

Nel parlatorio dove son venuto a cercare dell'antico maestro, riprovo il disagio che già da ragazzo. [...] Ritrovo nel maestro i bruschi modi che amo. Propone con mio sollievo un'arrampicata all'aperto. [...] Qualcosa a questo punto passa nella voce del maestro; l'haalzata ad affrettare disinvoltura; non vorrei fosse a causa di questo incontro. Per uno simile, un giorno che ci accompagnava in una passeggiata collegiale, la voce, mi sovviene, gli era uscita così diversa da non lasciarmela riconoscere; perchè, già allora, m'era venuto di pensare che la via scelta dal maestro doveva condurre più presto alla santità che alla pace. Ma quella volta erano delle sguaiatelle messe in umore dalla nostra repressa ingordigia e che aizzava l'imbarazzo del prete; questa è una donna limpida e bonaria che ha, capisco, il figlio al collegio e saluta come importunasse, scorrendo via sui piedi scalzi. Lo guardo. Che vita deserta. Di genitori, non ho udito da lui come ne avesse avuto. Dalla sua terra, più del disamore per il borgo nativo *tutto ciottoli e buine*, lo tiene lontano la paura, come di versiera, della sorella; miscredente e accesa socialista, che non ha voluto rivederlo da quando, ordinandosi, ha disertato secondo lei il suo posto di stenti. I colleghi, coi quali per principio è solidale, uno ad uno li vede quali sono e gli sfuggono sul loro conto parole senza carità. Appena usciti dalla scuola, gli alunni si rifanno della passata soggezione non salutandolo; avvicinati, non nascondono impazienza e distacco. Di tanti che in una vita d'insegnamento gli son passati sotto gli occhi, il mio è l'unico viso che gli ricompaia qualche volta davanti. L'odo discorrere di scuola. Ha dovuto improvvisarsi insegnante di matematica e se la cava benone. Anche da fuori ricorrono a lui per i compiti... (gli insegnanti borghesi, si sa: moglie, bambini, altro da pensare...). Lì per lì li spiccia. Il teorema d'ieri, a esempio; lo enuncia, trincia in aria la dimostrazione... Risolto! gesto di Pilato, risatina boriosa. (È la soddisfazione, lo scuso di farcela alla sua età in una materia nuova; non si vanterebbe così del suo latino).²⁵

²⁴ Lagorio, *Sbarbaro*, pp. 58-59.

²⁵ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 327-331.

The passage begins with Sbarbaro recalling his old teacher's beloved manners. The teacher and the former pupil decide to take a walk, metaphorically recalling the teacher's path through life. Sbarbaro focuses on the teacher's life, showing a deep affection and a sense of profound empathy. Roles are well defined. Don Gresino is always referred to as *maestro*. Sbarbaro calls himself the schoolboy (*ragazzo*) or simply one of the many students taught by Don Gresino. The melancholic, yet affectionate tone of the last sentence (*Non si vanterebbe così del suo latino*) sets the seal on the lovely homage to the old teacher, whose most precious lesson is his relentless yet modest devotion to teaching.

A significant anti-model, on the contrary, is the professor of Italian literature Pietro Fiammazzo to whom Sbarbaro devotes a long, ironic description in his *Gocce* (1963):

Lo vedo ancora il *mio* dantista, nell'aula gelida, chiuso nel soprabito dove non una sola asola era sbottonata, ritto in piedi alto com'era presso la cattedra che sfiorava appena del gomito, sogguardandoci distante e sospettoso di dietro le lenti in equilibrio precario e segnando il tempo con la lunga appuntitissima matita brandita in aria scandire appoggiando sulle dieresi: *Quale nei plenilunii sereni Trivia ride tra le ninfe eterne ...*, citazione prediletta che a causa dei nostri cachinni e rumoreggiamenti inconsulti di rado riusciva a condurre a termine e interrompeva allora per esclamare col suo Autore: *O terreni animai, o menti sciocche*. [...] Debole insegnante, era certo una cima nel suo campo se a una accusa di anticlericalismo da un foglio locale lanciata contro il liceo, in qualità di preside era andato in persona a smentirla con ... fosse candore o vanità o le due doti in una... la lista delle sue pubblicazioni dantesche; così imponente che per ospitarla il direttore intimidito aveva dovuto cederle un'intera colonna; [...] Peccato che di quella eccellenza poco ci fosse dato di profittare: lezione era la lettura del poema fatta con esclusivo riguardo all'*eletta* dizione del verso e alla pronuncia dove larga e dove stretta delle vocali; e si trascinava, di continuo interrotta da innocui richiami a una maggiore serietà, appesantita dall'elenco delle varianti dei diversi codici afferto tal quale (*messo t'ho innanzi, omai per te ti ciba*) e, ai passi da qualche finto zelante dichiarati oscuri, dall'invito sempre lo stesso: *vegga la nota in calce*; ma anche arieggiata ogni tanto da inaspettate notizie come (a proposito d'una località nominate nel Quinto del Purgatorio) quella che *a Mira si fabbrican le candele*; e al *finis* del bidello immancabilmente coronate dalla constatazione, da tutti accolta in letizia, *ancor oggi non s'è fatto nulla di nulla*.

Vero, che compensava tale lentezza lo scarto ch'egli faceva d'interi canti e, di quelli scelti, la lettura spesso parziale: ché all'approssimarsi d'un episodio sconveniente come quello maleodorante di Taide o solo in vista d'un vocabolo ripreso dal Galateo, per rispetto certo all'immagine ideale del *grande severo* custodiva, girava al largo; senonché, così segnalati, erano proprio questi e unicamente i brani che leggevamo nella certezza di farvi la conoscenza di personaggi corposi, a noi ben più simpatici di quelli ineffabili che lui ci additava.

Naturalmente i due o tre che, cessato l'obbligo, davvero avrebbero letto Dante erano anche i più insofferenti del suo modo di presentarlo; ma della loro diversità lui non aveva sospetto e delle ribellioni così poco si accorgeva che in occasione d'un tema sui seminatori di zizzania (non dava temi che d'argomento dantesco o storici sul Trecento) all'impertinente che l'aveva svolto sotto aspetto botanico, invece di infliggere come ben gli stava un voto *scadente* in

condotta, aveva tributato pubblica lode per aver, disse, mostrato di possedere cognizioni, di scarsa attinenza sì col tema, ma indice d'una buona coltura generale.

Il bilancio che a fin d'anno chi ci tenesse poteva fare era quindi lo stesso che onestamente lui faceva ad ogni fine lezione: tutto ciò che della *Commedia* ritenevamo, per averli le mille volte uditi, erano i due versi menzionati in principio e neanch'essi avremmo saputo reperirli nel testo. Le forti emozioni, si dice, sono mute; e forse il suo amore per Dante era troppo perchè potesse comunicarlo.²⁶

The difference between the model and the anti-model is evident from the style of the fragment itself. For Don Gresino, Sbarbaro employs a pathetic and emotional register, whereas for Fiammazzo he uses an ironic and sarcastic style. Fiammazzo comes across as an unreliable source of information from the way in which he is presented. The *aula gelida* immediately anticipates the dry and cold nature of his teaching. Fiammazzo's pedantic approach, towards which Sbarbaro is clearly hostile, is epitomized in the way he reads. The teacher is entirely concentrated on the perfect diction and on the pronunciation of dieresis. Philological expertise, knowledge of prosody and a tedious display of variants also demonstrate Fiammazzo's hyper-academic approach.

As is evident from this memory, Sbarbaro entirely rejected this approach. The lack of communication with the students, evidenced by the fact that the professor was not even aware of the students' protests, is highlighted throughout the entire passage. Such a critique finds its peak in the final paradox of the teacher who, for loving the subject too much, cannot communicate it. Besides the satirical description of teachers we have just seen, there are several passages expressing the poet's own radical ideas about school. In *Fuochi fatui*, such passages are grouped together and presented as a negative summa on teaching:

Al motto che campeggia sulla facciata: Non scholae sed vitae: «Si scrive così ma si legge: Non discenti sed docenti.»

Laurea è dispensa da imparare: il pezzo di carta su cui ci si siede per difendere l'alfine acquisito diritto all'ignoranza.

²⁶ Now in Sbarbaro, *Trucoli dispersi*, n. 201, pp. 105-107.

Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione, mi scalzerei il posto col primo provvedimento: abolirei le scuole. L'istruzione tornerebbe a essere quello che è: il privilegio di chi lo merita. Il quale non avrà bisogno di insegnanti: imparerà da sé – che è il solo modo di imparare.

Prova a chiedere a chi la parla dalla nascita gli elementi della sua lingua; al corridore, come si va in bicicletta... Insegnare si può solo quello che non si sa.²⁷

This sequence of thoughts condenses Sbarbaro's critique of the school system. In sum, teaching is self-teaching, or making oneself learn from what one does not know. The poet begins by accusing the school of mystifying its function. He then faults higher education for offering degrees as a means to dismiss intellectual commitment instead of fostering the individual's responsibility in learning. Sbarbaro eventually and climactically postulates a condition, apparently paradoxical and somewhat reminiscent of the Socratic approach, in which teaching is based solely on ignorance. In other words, a teacher can only teach what he does not know. Sbarbaro's ideas are not as naïve as they might seem at first glance. From an eccentric position, but, evidently, from his experience as a teacher of classics, Sbarbaro engages with two major issues in modernity: the role of school and of the transmission of classical literature. His fierce criticism of his hyper-academic teachers may remind us of Michel de Montaigne's stark opposition to pedantry in relation to the transmission of classical civilization. In his seminal essay *Les abeilles et les araignées*, Marc Fumaroli assigned a specific importance to Montaigne's thought in the *querelle* between the Ancients and the Moderns.²⁸ In the famous metaphor of the bees and flowers (which has a very long tradition, going all the way back to Plato), Montaigne pinpointed the vital function of the Ancients:

Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais ells en font après le miel, qui est tout leur: ce n'est pas thym nu marjolaine; ansi les pieces empruntées d'autrui, il les transformera et confondra, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien, à savoir son jugement.²⁹

²⁷ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 455-456.

²⁸ Marc Fumaroli, *Les abeilles et les araignées* in Anne-Marie Lecoq, *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes. XVII-XVIII siècles* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), pp. 7-218, (p. 10).

²⁹ In Fumaroli, *Les abeilles et les araignées*, p. 11.

It is evident how Montaigne considered the classics a vital source of inspiration (*les fleurs*) for the Moderns (*les abeilles*) who, thanks to the Ancients' mediation, can develop their inherent nature (*un ouvrage tout sien*).³⁰ In opposition to the true *connoisseurs* are the pedantic imitators of the Ancients, parasites who spoil their noble function.³¹ *La fable de la fecondite genereuse* of the Classics, to put it in Fumaroli's words, and the critique of psittacism, i.e. parrot repetition, echoes in Sbarbaro's thoughts on school. As a teacher of classics, Sbarbaro not only condemned the pedantic attitude, stressing the damage such an approach could bring to the true knowledge of the classics, but also fostered a personalized didactics. Sbarbaro conceived the study of the classics as a shared experience in which the student and the teacher are equally participating at the same level. Among the many passages stressing this aspect, the dialogic nature of this experience is particularly evident in one of his *Trucioli dispersi*:

Conquistai la fiducia della nuova scolara, prevenendola che del greco non so l'alfabeto.³²

Behind Sbarbaro's provocative statement we should read a twofold agenda. First, it reveals a substantial critique of the canonical method of teaching Greek in schools. By telling the student that he, the tutor of Greek, does not know the Greek alphabet he immediately distances himself from the traditional, Fiammazzo-like way of teaching Greek in school. Indeed, he questions the very principle of educational authority. Secondly, it is evident how Sbarbaro uses a paradox to put forward his own *metodo della partecipazione*. The poet undermines his own authority by declaring his gaps in knowledge, aiming at putting himself on the same level as the student. Sbarbaro's criticism towards the limitations of classical education in an institutional system bears interesting analogies with Friedrich

³⁰ Fumaroli, *Les abeilles et les araignées*, pp. 11-12.

³¹ Fumaroli, *Les abeilles et les araignées*, p. 12.

³² Sbarbaro, «*Trucioli dispersi*», n. 88, p. 60.

Nietzsche's polemical attack on the so-called classical education in the homonymous fragment taken from *Daybreak. Thoughts on the prejudices of morality*:

The so-called classical education. – [...] the squandering of our own youth when our educators failed to employ those eager, hot and thirsty years to lead us towards *knowledge* of things but used them for a so-called 'classical education'. The squandering of our own youth when we had a meager knowledge of the Greeks and the Romans and their languages drummed into us in a way as clumsy as it was painful and one contrary to the supreme principle of all education, that one should offer food only to him *who hungers for it!* [...] -What we felt instead was the breath of a certain disdain for the actual sciences in favour of history, of 'formal education' and of 'the classics'! And we let ourselves be deceived so easily! Formal education! Could we not have pointed to the finest teachers at our grammar schools, laughed at them and asked: 'are they the products of formal education? And if not, how can they teach it? And the classics! Did we learn anything of that which these same ancients taught their young people? Did we learn to speak or write as they did? Did we practice unceasingly the fencing-art of conversation, dialectics? Did we learn to move as beautifully and proudly as they did, to wrestle, to throw, to box as they did? Did we learn anything of the asceticism practiced by all Greek philosophers? Were we trained in a single one of the antique virtues and in the manner in which the ancients practised it? Was all reflection on morality not utterly lacking in our education – not to speak of the only possible critique of morality, a brave and rigorous attempt to *live* in this or that morality? Was there ever aroused in it any feeling that the ancients regarded more highly than the moderns? Were we ever shown the divisions of the day and of life, and goals beyond life, in the spirit of antiquity? Did we learn even the ancient languages in the way we learn those of living nations – namely, so as to speak them with ease and fluency? Not one real piece of ability, of new capacity, out of years of effort! [...] For the proud conceit of our classics teachers goes far in imagining they are as it were *in possession of the ancients* that they transfer this arrogance to their pupils, together with the suspicion that such possession, while it certainly does not make us happy, is good enough for poor, foolish, honest old book-dragons: 'let these dragons brood over their hoard! For it will be worthy of them!' – it is with this silent thought that our classical education is concluded. – This can no longer be made good – so far as we are concerned! But let us not think only of ourselves.³³

In this splendid passage, Nietzsche outlines the problematic complexity of classical education in all its complexity, touching on such fundamental themes as the 'hunger for knowledge' and teachers' communication of the classics. The shortcomings of formal education are primarily connected to the fact that the students do not experience a real desire for knowledge. Nietzsche almost seems to postulate an anthropologically necessary reason for learning. Sbarbaro's *fuoco fatuo* 'L'istruzione tornerebbe a essere quello che è: il privilegio di chi lo merita'³⁴ strongly echoes Nietzsche's view on the 'hunger for knowledge'

³³ Friederich Nietzsche, *Daybreak. Thoughts on the prejudices of morality*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale, ed. by Maudemarie Clark; Brian Letter (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), thought n. 195, pp. 115-116.

³⁴ Sbarbaro, *OVP*, pp. 456

as ‘the supreme principle of all education.’ Moreover, Nietzsche’s critique of ‘our classics teachers’ helps us to appreciate Sbarbaro’s profound resilience towards formal education. Nietzsche laments that teachers of classics developed a despotic possession and failed to communicate and teach the most valuable of all lessons one could learn from the classics, namely *the reflection on morality*. Such deficits lead to a certain kind of deception as well as failure to deliver to the students the complexity entailed in the knowledge held by the Greeks. Sbarbaro’s critique of compulsory education and shallow academism were the reasons why Sbarbaro himself quit his own ‘formal’ education. As a student, he did not pursue higher education. Nonetheless, his passion for the Classics was not thwarted. When he had the opportunity of becoming a private tutor of Classics, he promptly devised a new didactic method. In an autobiographical piece written in the form of an interview, *Visita al maestro*,³⁵ he constructs his professional trajectory in a most memorable manner:

- Maestro... - esordisco.
- ... di scuola. E nemmeno: non ho la laurea né diploma.
Io recito pronta (non mi presentavo sprovvista): «Laurea è dispensa da imparare: il pezzo di carta su cui ci si siede per difendere l’alfine acquisito diritto all’ignoranza».
Non mi lascia finire: lo infastidisce sentirsi citare.
- Sai piuttosto come andò che non proseguì, come si dice, gli studi? – E racconta: - Quando uscii dal liceo, mio padre era vecchio e si viveva in tre sulla pensione di maggiore del Genio. Quel che s’augurava, e al più presto, era di vedermi impiegato; ma s’arrese alle insistenze dei miei insegnanti. Un mattino, Benedetta mi accompagnò alla stazione, mi consegnò trenta lire, un calamaietto tascabile e con questo viatico m’imbarcai per Firenze: si trattava di vincere una borsa di studio a quell’Istituto di Studi superiori. Arrivando, cenai con un uovo in obbedienza alla raccomandazione di risparmiare. Senonché la notte porta consiglio: la prospettiva di girare per il resto della vita il mio disco davanti alla scolaresca svogliata di qualche ginnasio di provincia, mi atterrì; aggiungi che, ferrato in greco e latino, mi presentavo al concorso completamente digiuno di Dante; tanto m’aveva reso uggioso il divino poema un illustre dantista che, ti basti questo, all’unica figlia aveva messo nome Beatrice. Fatto sta che il mattino dopo, invece di avviarmi verso piazza San Marco per sostenere la prima prova, passava una fanfara militare e mi accodai. Scarto, di cui ancora ringrazio il Cielo-.
- Insegna, però... - osservai.
- Già; e dalla fine della prima guerra. Ritornato dal fronte e liberatomi con un cavillo dall’impiego – altro scarto che benedico – riaffrontati col solo aiuto del vocabolario l’odioso latino e il diletto greco, cimentandomi direttamente coi testi; e in capo a qualche mese di

³⁵ Zoboli, *Sbarbaro e i tragici greci*, p. 24, pinpointed the history of this interview. The piece firstly appeared with the title *Intervista al poeta Camillo Sbarbaro* in *Primizie* (1958), edited by Cinzia Fiore. Sbarbaro subsequently edited the interview and decided to include it in *Scampoli* (1960). Eventually, Sbarbaro excluded the passage from the *ne varietur* edition *OVP*.

duro lavoro, fui in grado di assistere uno studente universitario nella traduzione di Pindaro... SÌ, perchè – ricòrdatelo, figliola – imparare si può solo da sé. Le scuole ci sono per chi insegna -.³⁶

The poet boils down his professional life into two *scarti* originating from the same root, touching again on the fundamental role of necessity as the engine of learning experience, a necessity which - it is worth underlining again - must be awakened within the pupil. The almost invisible assistance of the so-called teacher (indeed, Sbarbaro uses the verb *assistere*), a linguistic instruction solely based on dictionaries - interestingly there is no mention of the use of grammars - and close reading of the texts (*cimentandomi direttamente con i testi*) are the means of instruction.

Although he refused to become a professional teacher, Sbarbaro did teach for the rest of his life. A corpus of letters titled *Trama delle lucciole* contains a significant number of references to Sbarbaro's teaching activity, testifying to a longstanding and intense commitment. Three fundamental aspects of Sbarbaro's pedagogy of the classics emerge from this corpus. A letter dated Genoa, the 9th of September 1937, offers a precious insight into the effects that teaching had on Sbarbaro:

Caro Angelo,
[...] Io non so se sto bene o male: buono certo, perché ogni giorno mi mette buono la bastonatura di sei ore di lezione ed altrettante di preparazione [...] Ma mi sorride il pensiero che fra dieci giorni o poco più mi porterò a spasso per mano come un bravo ragazzino che se lo ha meritato.³⁷

Alongside an improvement in his morale, in this letter Sbarbaro hints at a contradiction between labour and pleasure (*mi mette buono la bastonatura*). Interestingly, the coexistence of labour and pleasure recalls Bo's reading of Sbarbaro's poetic work and

³⁶ Now in Sbarbaro, *Trucoli dispersi*, n. 129, pp. 88.

³⁷ Sbarbaro, *La trama delle lucciole*, letter n. 59, pp. 108-109.

creates a parallel between the experience of being a teacher and that of being a poet.³⁸

Another letter, dated Genoa 17th of January 1926, sheds light on the ethical implications of the ‘contradiction’ of teaching:

Quel calore che è ancora in me lo metto tutto quotidianamente nell'insegnamento; che mi lascia come una spugna strizzata. È la mia ultima nobiltà e la distrazione che mi allevia l'attesa.³⁹

The poet admits that he puts all the energy (*calore*) left in him into teaching, thus disclosing its enlivening, ennobling (*la mia ultima nobiltà*) effect on his existence. Indeed, it is a very ethical experience, a preparation for death (*mi allevia l'attesa*). The fundamental importance of teaching in his everyday life is evident in another letter, dated Genoa 3rd of January 1936:

Caro Angelo,
[...] Lavoro a rottadicollo (ma non per me); sono 3 giorni, se oggi è il 3, che non esco. Persino l'erbario (alle mie spalle dorme). Il commercio quotidiano coi Grandi è per me piacevolissimo (sono un insegnante nato).⁴⁰

The positive remark on his gift for teaching (*sono un insegnante nato*) is unexpected and is unique in this collection of reminiscences. The *commercio coi Grandi* brings to mind Niccolò Machiavelli's dialogue with *antiqui huomini* described in his celebrated letter to Francesco Vettori – which gives Sbarbaro's classicism a broader scope and possibly the intention to be included within a very ancient lineage within the Italian tradition.

³⁸ Bo, *Com'era Sbarbaro*, pp. 10-11, connected Sbarbaro's decision to become a teacher to the primary contradiction at the heart of his poetry.

³⁹ Sbarbaro, *La trama delle lucciole*, letter n. 9, p. 33.

⁴⁰ Sbarbaro, *La trama delle lucciole*, letter n. 46, pp. 87-88.

2.2 “Sorpresa che riserva una scolaresca!”: the unexpected gifts of teaching in Sbarbaro’s *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*

The letters and the aphoristic thoughts scattered throughout Sbarbaro’s poetic work provided us with a clear picture of the poet’s ideas about school and teaching. Yet, Sbarbaro worded his most profound reflections on the relationship between student and teacher in a memorial for one of his former students. The eulogy *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò* was composed by Sbarbaro in 1946 for a commemorative volume *Un sabotatore: Giorgio Labò*, with contributions by Lionello Venturi, Mario Labò (the father), Giulio Carlo Argan, Franco Calamandrei, Alberto Lattuada and Antonello Trombadori. Unfortunately, Sbarbaro failed to submit his piece on time.⁴¹ He finally published the *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò* only in 1969 (700 copies), twenty-five years after Labò’s death.⁴² Labò (1919-1944), a student in the faculty of architecture, was called to arms during WW2. He joined the GAP (Gruppi di Azione Patriottica) as a sapper, but was captured by the German troops on the 1st of February 1944, tortured and eventually killed after refusing to provide information about his fellow soldiers.⁴³ Sbarbaro privately tutored Giorgio Labò when he was at the “ginnasio” and later at the “Liceo”, and his personal relationship with Labò as a student largely informs the *Ricordo*. The learning aspect is so prominent that the essay could be considered a pedagogical treatise on the teaching of Latin language and literature. The notion of teaching, however, ends up expanding into a metaphor for the nature of interaction with the other subjectivities.

The essay can be divided into four sections. The first section sets the foundation of Sbarbaro’s teaching philosophy. A psychological assessment of the pupil’s personality informs the second section. Here, we also find the “golden” rules of Sbarbaro, concerning

⁴¹ The book has been recently republished: *Un sabotatore: Giorgio Labò*, ed. by Francesca Romana Stabile (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2014).

⁴² Camillo Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò* (Milan: All’insegna del pesce d’oro, 1969). The piece, with a different title *Addio a Giorgio*, also features in *Camillo Sbarbaro. «Trucioli dispersi»*, eds. G. Costa; V. Scheiwiller (Milan: Libri Scheiwiller, 1986), pp. 121-127.

⁴³ A brief biographical note (*Notizia*) is offered in Sbarbaro’s *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 7.

the study of Latin grammar, syntax and literature. The third section takes a moral turn. Sbarbaro, indeed, realises that what will stay with the student is not the subject taught but, more probably, some inherent qualities that he conveyed as a teacher and as a human being. At the same time, this section develops the two-way relationship between student and teacher as it demonstrates the nature of the lesson that Sbarbaro learned from his pupil. The fourth and last section fulfils the dramatic duty of bidding the final farewell to the student. Focusing on the poignant beauty of Rapallo's maritime setting, the poet makes the seashore into a symbol of the passage from life to death where voices are muted. Silence remains the only option thus mercilessly iterating the impotence of art and poetry in the face of death.

Quite effectively, Sbarbaro begins the text with the image of a voice emerging from a class of students:

Se insegnando si avesse presente in chi può cadere, la nostra voce sarebbe meno sicura. Sopresa che riserva una scolaresca! dal suo anonimo quasi sempre un volto si stacca che avevamo confuso con gli altri; dal brusio di tante, prima o poi una voce si leva che – s'anche parla un linguaggio non nostro – col suo accento di convinzione ci turba e ci costringe in ascolto.⁴⁴

The reference to a language that is not “of our own” highlights the dialogical dimension at the heart of Sbarbaro's teaching approach. The element of difference creates a stimulating disturbance enforcing the act of listening and thus initiating the dialogue with others. Whose voices are most likely to rise? Is there a way to recognise the type of student from the voice? These are Sbarbaro's questions.⁴⁵ The surprise, according to Sbarbaro, never comes from the model student, the one who consistently agrees with the teacher on the majority of things:

Con Giorgio la sorpresa fu doppia: a quella di rivelarsi di punto in bianco qualcuno, egli aggiunse – impartita in silenzio – una lezione di vita. Avviene così che ad un'età in cui per

⁴⁴ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 9.

apprendere è tardi ci troviamo costretti a rientrare nei banchi.⁴⁶

Labò's surprising role even made the teacher swap roles. The latter thus became the student and Labò the teacher, an exchange particularly dear to Sbarbaro, the one on which his *metodo della partecipazione* is based. Sbarbaro then focuses on Labò's personality:

Scolaro modello Giorgio non fu. E non tanto perché indocile e caparbio – solo chi è vuoto è anche pronto ad accogliere un contenuto purchessia – ma perché delle cosiddette materie di studio non ce n'era una, ch'io sappia, dalla quale non aborrisse: resistenza a ciò che ci è inflitto che lascia, a quella età, presentare un carattere.⁴⁷

It becomes clear that Sbarbaro is attempting to establish a parallel with his own personality. In the same way that Labò was not a model student so was Sbarbaro not a model teacher, and this similarity is the reason why the student and the teacher got along well from the start:

Con me Giorgio si trovò subito a suo agio; sentì subito di non aver più a che fare con un insegnante di professione che s'attedia al suono della propria voce. Ad imparare non si annoiò più per la semplice ragione che a insegnarli io mi divertivo.

As Sbarbaro has also indicated elsewhere, the enjoyment experienced by the tutor is what triggers the student's intellectual involvement. Moreover, Sbarbaro's pride in not being a professional teacher pairs with his satisfaction of being able to help a non-model student. Just as Labò did not find professional teachers stimulating because they did not seem to enjoy teaching, so did Sbarbaro not enjoy teaching a class in which the number of students prevented him from developing a personalised approach. It is evident that pleasure and enjoyment in the learning activity were important for both for the non-model student and non-professional teacher and were possible only in a one-to-one dimension. On these premises, Sbarbaro seeks to establish a "trust-based relationship" with the student from the very beginning and in order to do this he uses a technique with which we are by now

⁴⁶ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, pp. 9-10.

familiar:

Per cominciare m'accaparrai la sua fiducia parlando della scuola in genere come di un istituto fatto più per il comodo dei maestri che per l'utile degli scolari; e del latino che vi si insegna come di una lingua artificiale, fissata dal cattivo gusto dei grammatici con una rigidità che, sebbene pigli Cicerone a modello, neppure il modello si salva per essa da mende.⁴⁸

It is important to bear in mind that Sbarbaro did not change ideas nor he did contradict himself on the views shared with Labò at the beginning of their relationship. This way, he won the student's confidence and empathized with him, who so fiercely rejected every single subject, resisting the school system as a whole. Very likely, Sbarbaro projected his own past as student onto Labò's. Once the bond was created, Sbarbaro had to attend to the difficult task of demonstrating that Latin is not the artificial language experienced by Labò with other teachers. But how did Sbarbaro succeed? How was Sbarbaro's Latin different from the Latin taught in schools? And how did Sbarbaro demonstrate that the school serves teachers more than it does serve the student?

The third section of the *Ricordo* is devoted to the demonstration that Latin can be taught as a living language. Sbarbaro explains his teaching methodology with practical examples:

Venire a sapere che nello stesso latino «aureo», contrariamente a quanto gli avevano detto, accanto a quanto gli avevano detto, accanto a *potest s'incontra potestur*, che persino il soggetto in accusativo che viene riprovato come l'errore per eccellenza può giustificarsi con ottimi testi alla mano; apprendere che, visto senza paraocchi, il latino è una lingua non meno libera e viva d'ogni altra, lo tirò da un incubo.⁴⁹

Sbarbaro shows his student that Latin is no artificial language, as the so-called exceptions demonstrate (*potest/potestur*). By showing the variety in morphology and syntax, he establishes a comparison between Latin and any other living language, where exceptions are not perceived as such. Sbarbaro's emphasis on exceptions parallels his own and Labò's

⁴⁸ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, pp. 10-11.

situation, themselves exceptions as a teacher and a student. The effects of concrete examples have on Giorgio are linked to the sensation of coming into bright sunlight after a period spent in the dark:

Se sai che uscendo trovi il sole, ti rassicuri meglio a restare provvisoriamente nel buio d'una stanza; e saputo che si poteva camminare spedito, a procedere con le pastoie Giorgio prese il gusto che si trova a cimentarsi in una scommessa.⁵⁰

The poet prides himself on having been able to communicate to Labò that the hardest part of language learning was propaedeutic to the future beauty of literature. This is an essential step in the awakening of the student's involvement. Once the student's interest is aroused, Sbarbaro's task became easier. The poet resorted to a visual aid to familiarize the student with logical analysis:

Intanto poiché a precludergli l'accesso al ginnasio superiore era l'analisi logica, pensai di presentargli questo spaventacchio che sta sulla soglia a scoraggiare chi entra, sotto aspetto coloristico: il soggetto era rosso, blu l'oggetto e i vari complementi si spartivano fra loro colori assortiti. La novità della cosa lo incuriosì. Brandendo matite multicolori aggrediva la frase da tradurre e la convertiva in una tavolozza. Avevo svegliato la sua attenzione: il più era fatto. Quello che sinallora era stato un supplizio diventava uno svago.⁵¹

The colours strategy captures the student's attention and awakens his curiosity. At the same time, the comparison between the sentence and the palette symbolically anticipates Labò's interest in De Chirico's art. With equal pedagogical commitment, Sbarbaro devises a practice in which the teacher induces the student to correct the mistakes he (the teacher) has deliberately made:

Quando nello svago dava segni di stanchezza, gli sottentravo come discente; ed ero io allora a spropositare a tutto spiano in rosso e in blu e lui a correggermi vittorioso.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p.11.

⁵¹ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 11.

⁵² Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 11.

By making mistakes on purpose, the teacher stimulates the student's attention and boosts his confidence.

What about dictionaries and grammars, the fundamental tool of classical education?

Sbarbaro did not make any use of them:

(Gli avevo annunciato che non si aprirebbe una grammatica e mantenni la promessa: l'essenziale delle forme si imparò a furia di esercizio. Il parco uso che fece sempre del vocabolario lo portò alla peggio a creare qualche innocuo neologismo.)⁵³

The teacher wanted his student to have a totally anti-academic learning experience for his student. Sbarbaro's motto 'cimentandomi direttamente coi testi'⁵⁴ is put into practice also in his tutorials with Labò. Latin syntax is then introduced through a few examples, as is characteristic of Sbarbaro's pedagogy:

Così quando in quarta si dovette affrontare la sintassi, alla astrattezza – spesso astrusa e sempre ostica – delle regole, sostituii la concretezza degli esempi. Prima che in latino, lo avezzai a volgere ad alta voce la frase nella forma che assumerebbe nella nuova lingua; a non dire «piuttosto che servire, preferir morire», ma piuttosto «piuttosto che servisse», facendogli notare, come in questo caso, la maggiore aderenza dell'espressione (in confronto della nostra). Pochi esempi, che avevo cura fossero sempre gli stessi, smaltivano pagine e pagine di regole. Si trovò così presto ad avere in mente una specie di sintassi figurata; un repertorio di frasi italiane (atteggiate alla latina) da servirgli da falsariga nel tradurre e d'un suono così insolito al nostro orecchio da stamparvisi per sempre.⁵⁵

Sintassi figurata: this is indeed a highly peculiar strategy based on analogy and difference.

First, Sbarbaro shows the similarity of Italian syntax to that of Latin. A repertoire of Italian sentences, modelled on a Latin structure, becomes the point of reference for the student when he has to translate from Latin into Italian. Difference is then used as a mnemonic strategy: because the sound of these sentences is so unusual the student is bound to remember them. Sbarbaro also uses one of the examples (*piuttosto che servire, preferir*

⁵³ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Sbarbaro, *Trucioli dispersi*, n. 129, pp. 88.

⁵⁵ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 12.

morire) to refer to and anticipate Labò's tragic end: Labò preferred to die instead of betraying his fellow partisans.

As far as the teaching of literature is concerned, Sbarbaro returns to the philosophy of one of his *Trucioli dispersi*:

In liceo il mio compito fu più lieto. Ormai si trattava di fargli gustare gli Autori e bastava per questo liberarli dall'aura imbecille di intoccabilità della quale testi e scuole li circondano e che allontana chi sarebbe degno di accostarli perché in quella ammirazione ad ogni costo subodora a ragione una truffa.⁵⁶

The poet challenges all *a priori* admiration for Classical authors. Such *aura imbecille d'intoccabilità* precludes a sincere appreciation of the author and it is Sbarbaro's first objective to question such an approach. The teacher can speak with an authoritative voice on this matter only if he shows the students that he is capable of criticism:

Solo trovando liberamente a ridire in Omero come in Dante, correndo cioè – piuttosto di mentire – il rischio di ingannarsi, si acquista credito agli occhi dello scolaro quando gli si addita questa o quella bellezza o quando più eloquentemente gliela sottolinea la voce lisa di commozione di chi per la centesima volta si rilegge con lui quel canto o quel verso.⁵⁷

This passage concludes the sections of the treatise devoted to Sbarbaro's methods of teaching Latin. Most importantly, this illuminating fragment pinpoints the act of reading and rereading the set texts as one of the cornerstones of Sbarbaro's relationship with his teaching of the Classics.

In the last and fourth section, Sbarbaro demonstrates once more how school is not the ideal place for learning. According to this view, it is entirely vain to think that subjects taught in school will remain in a person's memory. The dialogue-based pedagogy appears all the more necessary. Labò's progress, in the study of both Latin language and literature,

⁵⁶ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, pp. 12-13.

coincided with a personal maturity, which became a symbol for the mutual enrichment of the teacher and the student:

Senonché non è mai quello che ci si propone che si insegna davvero e in modo durevole; sì qualche cosa che esorbita dai programmi e che – come convinzione privata – a farne parte abbiamo il ritegno che s’ha a trasmettere un contagio. Ma le convinzioni vitali traspirano da noi nostro malgrado; e forse a mia insaputa avevo portato Giorgio a vedere nell’arte la sola consistenza, se, allo scadere del mio compito, quando già m’appagavo d’averlo passo passo condotto dalla proclamata ammirazione per il Giusti a quella per il Leopardi, ebbi la gioia di sentirlo impetuosamente interrompermi per partire lancia in resta contro un critico ostile alla pittura di De Chirico e manifestarmi l’urgente bisogno di controbatterlo su un giornale. [...] Ma – ciò che ancora non avevo visto abbastanza – nonché dell’arte, della stessa accettazione della vita era per lui presupposto la libertà e più imperioso d’ogni parola da dire, l’odio per la prepotenza.⁵⁸

The value of teaching goes beyond the subject taught. The poet acknowledges that his legacy as a teacher is more connected with his own ideas than with literature. Although he avoided sharing his views on life with Labò, he did compare his *convinzione privata* to a contagious disease that he was very careful not to transmit to anyone. He realized that his influence, though, needed no words. Labò’s desire to support publicly Giorgio De Chirico’s art (which to the poet signifies courage and a striving for freedom) was indeed interpreted by Sbarbaro as a proof of his influence. Labò’s struggle for these ideals when he was only a student forebodes, in Sbarbaro’s description, his commitment as a partisan during WW2:

Imbattutosi, dopo una prepotenza organizzata a governo che, giovinetto aveva dovuto subire, in un’altra, tetra e gelida come una macchina e straniera per giunta, era prevedibile che Giorgio l’avrebbe affrontata piuttosto che acconciarsivi.⁵⁹

Sbarbaro here alludes to the torture and imprisonment of Giorgio who refused to betray his fellow partisans and was therefore killed. Instead of dwelling on Labò’s death, Sbarbaro shifts the focus to the lesson that he was able to draw from his student:

A Giorgio devo d’aver conosciuto da presso un eroe. Egli ha dato per me contenuto a un’abusata figura rettorica, della quale i tempi, che di eroi spesseggiavano, avevano più che mai portato a diffidare. Tra troppi eroi a loro insaputa, Giorgio fu eroe di sua scelta, davanti a

⁵⁸ Sbarbaro, *Ricordi di Giorgio Labò*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁹ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 14.

se stesso e in silenzio. Ai genitori che di lui vivevano lascia per sopravvivere l'orgoglio di averlo avuto per figlio; a chi gli insegnò, il più alto e severo degli insegnamenti; alla patria umiliata, perché si salvi, l'esempio della sua serietà e del suo silenzio.⁶⁰

For Sbarbaro, Labò revived the meaning of a rhetorical figure (the hero) that was used up. Interestingly, just as Latin was a dynamic and varied language for Sbarbaro, so does Labò appear to him a hero not in a rhetorical manner, but as a reality. In other words, in the same way that Sbarbaro was able to show Labò that Latin was a free language and very much alive, Labò was able to demonstrate to Sbarbaro that the hero was not just a rhetorical conceit but a reality, equally alive.

In a cyclical structure, the end of the essay on Labò reconnects with the beginning. Labò's voice, when he was a student, rose above the rest and asked to be heard. As the life progressed, that voice held great surprises for his teacher. The roles were soon reversed: Labò taught Sbarbaro a life lesson. Yet, for Sbarbaro, it is again the merciless principle of Necessity to control his destiny. Now in the role of the student, the poet cannot raise his voice and be heard by his teacher, and hero, Labò, and his voice is instead silenced in the face of death.

By tracing the beginning of Sbarbaro's experience as a teacher and mapping its development through his life, we unravel his pedagogic engagement with the classics. My analysis of all the references to education in his poetic work – something not ever attempted before – demonstrates a persistent interest in the classical legacy and its connection to didactics. The most unique aspect of Sbarbaro's discourse rests on the interplay between his ideas on pedagogy and his own poetic universe. His teaching experience became part of his poetics, thus asserting the creative function the poet assigned to the knowledge of the Classics. His *metodo della partecipazione* and his strong dialogical approach, tailored to the individual needs of each student, aimed at fostering a

⁶⁰ Sbarbaro, *Ricordo di Giorgio Labò*, p. 15.

learning experience of mutual enrichment based on the direct knowledge of Classical poetry. Conceived in those terms, Sbarbaro's teaching activity proves to be a highly ethical stance. The poet as a teacher revived the study of Classical civilisation as a means to foster self-awareness and awaken the individual's creative responsiveness.

3.0 “Un confronto dell'intelligenza”: Giovanna Bemporad as a teacher of Greek and Latin in Pier Paolo Pasolini's school

Bemporad became involved with education as she taught Greek and Latin in Pier Paolo Pasolini's school in Friuli. Although the poets collaborated as friends during their life, because of their keen interest in translation and the Classics, their teaching experiences developed independently one from the other.

This is Bemporad's own account of that experience:

[Ho] vissuto a Casarsa in quotidiano contatto con Pasolini ed è stato il periodo più intenso della nostra amicizia, dopo il sodalizio bolognese. Mi trovavo là soltanto per insegnare greco e latino nella piccola scuola improvvisata di Pier Paolo, alla fine della guerra perchè i ragazzi del luogo e dei paesi intorno non rischiarono di morire sotto i bombardamenti andando in treno a Udine. Insegnavo greco e latino, o greco e inglese, come sostiene Nico Naldini, perché - a quanto pare - come dice Sbarbaro in una sua nota poesia: “[...] i ricordi son mani che non giungono a incontrarsi.” Comunque sia, ho avuto per scolari, più o meno miei coetanei, Nico Naldini e il fratello di Pier Paolo, Guido, a cui ho dato qualche lezione di letteratura italiana per l'esame di terza Liceo.⁶¹

As is clear from these lines, Bemporad considered herself a teacher of ancient rather than modern literature. English in this passage is definitely not stressed. Also, by emphasizing that her students were her own age, she constructed herself as an *enfant prodige*, while underlining the unconventional nature of the school itself. Another interesting element of this passage is the presence of three friends: Pasolini, Naldini and Sbarbaro. That teaching experience is located in a context of camaraderie and common memories - which, on the one hand, helps to objectify history, and on the other, to make history a quintessentially private and marginal piece of reality. The phrase *piccola scuola improvvisata* creates a

⁶¹ Giovanna Bemporad, *Pasolini, amico e antagonista in Pasolini e Bologna*, eds. D. Ferrari; G. Scalia (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 1998), p. 101.

powerful contrast with the noble duty that the school was fulfilling. The importance assigned to education emerges all the more if one considers the historical circumstances in which the independent school was established and operated. As Bemporad tells us in this excerpt, her teaching involvement is strongly connected to her friendship with Pasolini. They became friends during the years 1939-1940, in Bologna. Bemporad was still in school (although she would not stay there much longer), at the 'Liceo Galvani', and had already become famous for her poetic translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Pasolini, who had just enrolled at the University of Bologna, was then creating a group of literary friends.⁶² According to Bemporad, their first encounter happened precisely because Pasolini showed an interest in her poetic translations.⁶³ The poet needed contributors for his literary magazine *Il Setaccio* and asked Bemporad to help him. As we read in Enzo Siciliano's biography of Pasolini:

Pier Paolo la cercò: - lei frequentava la scuola a Bologna, al liceo Galvani: - Pier Paolo le offrì la collaborazione al "Setaccio". I due divennero amici, e si incontrarono anche spesso nella casa bolognese di lei, - un enorme stanzone, un tavolo vastissimo e carico oltre misura di libri.⁶⁴

⁶² Enzo Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1979), p. 54, described the group as follows: "Concluso il liceo, la cerchia di amicizi diventa più squisitamente letteraria. Compagno Francesco Leonetti, Roberto Roversi, Fabio Mauri (più giovane d'anni, ma già dotato d'un intuito penetrante), sua sorella Silvana, Luciano Serra, Fabio Luca Cavazza, Mario Ricci, Sergio Telmon, Achille Ardigò, Giovanna Bemporad". Nico Naldini, *Pasolini, una vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), p. 40, also included Bemporad among the group of friends that met in 1942: "Continua a frequentare Guf e Gil dove incontra altri amici, giovanissimi letterati, filosofi, pittori in erba: Fabio Mauri, Fabio Luca Cavazza, Achille Ardigò, Luigi Vecchi, Mario Ricci e la ragazza prodigio Giovanna Bemporad, che a quattordici anni ha già pubblicato la traduzione di alcuni canti dell'*Odissea*." Stefano Casi, *I teatri di Pasolini* (Milan: Ubulibri, 2005), p. 27, also pinpointed Pasolini's interest in the cultural ferment of Bologna: "La stagione 1939/1940, che corrisponde al suo ingresso all'università e all'inizio della sua sistematica attenzione alla realtà culturale che lo circonda...".

⁶³ On Bemporad's and Pasolini's first meeting we have a number of sources. Bemporad herself, in the aforementioned article *Pasolini, amico e antagonista*, p. 111, referred to this meeting as follows: "Ed è appunto nella mia casa di Bologna, nel grande salotto - studio della casa dei miei genitori (lo ricordo ancora con commozione) che è avvenuto il mio primo incontro con Pier Paolo. (Aveva sentito parlare di me e veniva a chiedermi di partecipare con poesie e traduzioni al primo numero della rivista universitaria da lui diretta, «Il Setaccio»). Siciliano, p. 61: "Arte letteratura, musica, poesia, teatro, cinema, anche politica: tali gli argomenti messi a "setaccio". [...] "Il setaccio" pubblica traduzioni da Saffo, Goethe, Hoelderlin (traduttrice Giovanna Bemporad, che, per ragioni razziali, si firmava Giovanna Bembo), da Machado (grande passione pasoliniana), da Baudelaire." Naldini, p. 47, also quotes Bemporad as one of the journal collaborators: "Il direttore del «Setaccio» è Giovanni Falzone, celebratore in versi dell' «Era Fascista». Consulente il pittore Italo Cinti; [...] Collaboratori: Giovanna Bemporad (che nasconde il nome ebraico con lo pseudonimo Giovanna Bembo), Carlo Alberto Manzoni [...]."

⁶⁴ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, p. 63. On Bemporad's eccentric personality see also Naldini, p. 47 who reports Fabio Mauri's words: "Insieme, una sera febbrile, andammo a conoscere (fastidiosamente consci della comune

Pasolini had a peculiar faith in the combination of literature and friendship, *una comunione letteraria* to put it with Siciliano's words.⁶⁵ Bemporad agreed to collaborate with his school in name of a similar faith, almost a religion of poetry. Her first visit to Casarsa, where the school was to be founded, took place in May 1943:

Alla fine di Maggio Giovanna Bemporad è la prima degli amici bolognesi a venir ospite per qualche giorno a Casarsa. Giovanna, innamorata della luna, vede le sue luci sfolgorare libere nella vasta campagna, durante le notti dell'oscuramento. Accetta di buon grado le amicizie paesane di Pier Paolo e già pensa a un suo possibile trasferimento a Casarsa dove le minacce della guerra e delle persecuzioni razziali sembrano ancora lontane.⁶⁶

This passage is from one of her future pupils, Domenico Naldini, describing Bemporad's stay in Casarsa. Naldini's idyllic description of the Friulian landscape, epitomized in Bemporad's fondness for the moon, is spoiled by the jarring reference to Fascism. Although he hypothesizes that Bemporad's move to Casarsa was due to Jewish origins, in fact it was not until September 1943 that Pasolini asked her to join him in Friuli:

I bombardamenti creano difficoltà anche ai ragazzi di Casarsa che frequentano le scuole di Pordenone e di Udine; nasce così il progetto di una scuoletta privata. A due chilometri da Casarsa, oltre la ferrovia, c'è il paese di San Giovanni di cui Versuta è la più lontana appendice verso il Tagliamento. In una casa abbandonata, di una certa dignità borghese, con due corridoi centrali al piano terra e al primo piano, con le stanze disposte ai lati, Pier Paolo e cinque suoi amici aprono alla fine di settembre una scuola con tutte le regole delle iscrizioni e degli orari. Il cappellano di San Giovanni, laureato in lettere, è solo un prestanome per la richiesta dei permessi all'autorità scolastica. Pier Paolo insegna materie letterarie e storiche, Cesare Bortotto scienze, Riccardo Castellani matematica e Giovanna Bemporad, richiamata subito da Bologna, greco e inglese. La scuola di San Giovanni, come primo esperimento didattico dura molto poco perché a metà novembre il provveditore agli studi di Udine manda una diffida amministrativa. La scuola viene chiusa e gli insegnanti decidono di continuare le lezioni ciascuno a casa propria.⁶⁷

Naldini stresses Pasolini's social agenda behind this didactic project. The private school aimed at complementing the public system which was under the strain of war.

precocità) la nostra Georges Sand: Giovanna Bemporad. Giovanna vestiva da uomo. Con i calzoni da avanguardista tirati alle ginocchia sotto un impermeabile privo di ogni colore... Ci leggeva la *sua Odissea*...".

⁶⁵ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, p. 54.

⁶⁶ Naldini, *Pasolini, una vita*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ Naldini, *Pasolini, una vita*, p. 62. On this see also Barth David Schwart, *Pasolini Requiem* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 239.

Unfortunately, once the Government declared the school illegal, the students started withdrawing. Between January and February 1944, Pasolini's experiment was definitively over.⁶⁸ As Naldini remarks, friendship, *philia*, was the leading criterion of the experiment. Bemporad was one of the *cinque amici* who made the school possible. More importantly, Bemporad was the first one to be called to teach in Casarsa.⁶⁹ The lack of a comprehensive scholarly study on the school of San Giovanni makes Naldini's memories a fundamental source. However, in his reconstruction of the school – he was one of the students attending – Naldini failed to highlight the school's poetic scope, by far the most prominent feature of the didactic experiment. Enzo Siciliano and Andrea Zanzotto underlined the uniqueness and the importance of this feature. Siciliano connected Pasolini's attraction for teaching with a project of linguistic renovation:

Ho parlato di immaginazione didascalica. In Pasolini era fortissima la tensione idealistica del maestro, - modulo sublimato d'una pulsione omoerotica. Questa tensione nutriva anche un possibile concetto di letteratura: lo nutriva d'un certo qual volontarismo. Il poeta desiderava "il ritorno a una lingua più vicina al mondo":- tuttavia, il mondo non intendeva scoprirlo individualmente, ma in comunità, coralmemente. A questo fine si profilò la scuola. [...] Per pochissimi alunni Pasolini aprì la scuola a Casarsa, in casa. Insegnò ai ragazzi, accanto ai classici italiani, greci e latini, come scrivere poesia friulana: la lirica pura e la *vilota*.⁷⁰

The school's end was to create an environment for Pasolini's new idea of literature. The discovery of this new concept of literature was to be experienced alongside the students, to whom Pasolini and Bemporad taught poetic composition,⁷¹ and with the other teachers involved in his school. Pasolini's *didactic imagination* applied to a collective project having poetry at its core is key to our understanding of Bemporad's teaching commitment. In his essay *Pedagogia*, Andrea Zanzotto further developed the connection between pedagogy and

⁶⁸ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, p. 84: "I ragazzi versavano alla scuola una piccola tassa: utile a pagare l'affitto del locale dove avvenivano le lezioni. Sopravvennero complicazioni burocratiche. Il provveditorato agli studi di Udine, sulla base di notizie raccolte, diffidò Pasolini dal proseguire nella sua attività. Tra il gennaio e il febbraio 1944, i ragazzi disertarono: la Bemporad appunto partì."

⁶⁹ Naldini, *Pasolini, una vita*, p. 54.

⁷⁰ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, pp. 79-80.

⁷¹ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, pp. 82-83.

literature postulating that Pasolini's enquiry as a whole revolved around the idea and the function of education.⁷² In Zanzotto's view, poetry and pedagogy not only intersect but constitute the basic identity of Pasolini's poetics as a whole. Through the categories of "poesia didascalica" and "pedagogia apedagogica" Zanzotto systematized the poetic meaning of Pasolini's didactic experiment:

Ma prima di tutto esisteva per lui la poesia, o meglio l'arte anche il più possibile polimorfa, didascalica proveniente da tutto, rivolta a tutto, eppure crescente anche da sé e in sé.⁷³

The prioritization of poetry as the highest form of pedagogy suggests a totalizing, self-containing and quasi-pantheistic dimension of literature. To better understand the implications deriving from this standpoint, Zanzotto employed the Freudian infantile polymorphous perversity to define Pasolini's *poesia-didascalica*. Zanzotto highlighted the fertile anomie (*fertile anomia*) entailed in the psychoanalytic category thus helping us to visualize Pasolini's attempt to redefine the concept of education outside normative models:

Da ciò la sua ricerca, fino all'ossessione, di quello che si vorrebbe chiamare un «iperspazio» ove costituire un'etica, una pedagogia futuribili e aperte al massimo, apedagogiche.⁷⁴

It is precisely within this non-normative attitude that we need to read Bemporad's presence in Pasolini's school. Indeed, Pasolini wanted Bemporad to be part of this *iperspazio*. She had what was needed: religious devotion to poetry and an outsider status. Bemporad brought to

⁷² Andrea Zanzotto, *Pedagogia* in *Aure e disincanti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), pp. 141-152. Jennifer Stone, *Pasolini, Zanzotto, and the question of pedagogy* in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: contemporary perspectives*, eds., Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 40-53, discussed the intersection between Pasolini's pedagogy and Zanzotto's interest in language and pedagogy. On Pasolini's pedagogy see also Enzo Golino, *Pasolini. Il sogno di una cosa. Pedagogia, Eros, Letteratura* (Milan: BUR, 1985). Golino traced the presence of pedagogy in Pasolini's whole literary corpus (cinema production excluded) as a constant and evolving issue informing the poet's creativity. Specifically, Golino proposed to read it as a natural urge (*un maestro naturale*) informed by a strong ethical stance. According to Golino's interpretation, Pasolini elevated pedagogy to the level of a civil duty for an entire generation.

⁷³ Zanzotto, *Pedagogia*, p. 144.

⁷⁴ Zanzotto, *Pedagogia*, p. 142.

the school anti-conformism and freedom of expression. As Siciliano wrote, Bemporad arrived in Casarsa with her *leggenda umana e letteraria*. Her past as a student is telling of how she conceived the relationship between institutional learning and her dedication to poetry. Rita Vitali Rosati reports an illuminating autobiographical fragment:

“Quel distacco [from school] fu una cosa naturale, in un certo senso scritta nel mio destino. Io con la scuola non legavo, così come non legavo con la famiglia, specialmente con mia madre. A dire proprio tutta la verità sono stata una contestatrice avanti lettera. Avevo scelto, per una forma di protesta esistenziale, di andare in giro senza scarpe, di non lavarmi, di non pettinarmi, di usare un linguaggio brutale. Non è vero però che portavo i pantaloni, come vuole una certa leggenda: indossavo una giacchetta nera e un gonnellino nero di quaranta anni prima, che avevo scovato in un ripostiglio. Per le strade, i ragazzi mi ridevano dietro, mi insultavano. Ma io nemmeno me ne accorgevo. Avevo un gran fuoco dentro, mi sentivo una vestale della poesia”.⁷⁵

Bemporad's totalizing devotion to literature was not compatible with institutional learning. It is interesting to see how Bemporad connects her decision to quit school to a far more structured project in which even her personal appearance also plays a role. The protest against a 'normal way' of existing within a bourgeois society informs her decision to reject social conventions, such as personal hygiene and physical appearance.⁷⁶ The combination of *gran fuoco della poesia* (indeed, the very self-identification with an ancient virgin priestess) and the *protesta esistenziale*, coupled with her uncompromising adhesion to poetry, perfectly fits in the *iperspazio apedagogico* of Pasolini's school. Students indeed were fascinated by her mysterious appearance and manners. Siciliano offers a sample of her hypnotizing readings in Casarsa:

Nella piccola aula casalinga di Casarsa, Giovanna Bemporad trascinava gli uditori leggendo i *Sepolcri* foscoliani. Anche Guido Pasolini era fra loro e a occhi sgranati seguiva la lettura e il commento, per intero dominato dall'idea “bella” del morire per la patria.⁷⁷

This excerpt provides a clear example of Bemporad's approach to teaching. The word

⁷⁵ Rita Vitali Rosati, “Non si uccide la poesia!”. *Frammenti ritrovati di Giovanna Bemporad* in «L'arengario. Studio bibliografico», <<http://www.arengario.it/autografi/non-si-uccide-la-poesia-frammenti-ritrovati-di-giovanna-bemporad>> [Accessed on 9 April 2016].

⁷⁶ On Bemporad's eccentric appearance see Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, p. 84

“trascinava” conveys the performative core of her method, based on reading. The theatrical delivery was also in line with Pasolini’s teaching agenda. In a passage from the *Diario di un insegnante* Pasolini underlined the importance of a dramatic approach to teaching.⁷⁸ Elio Pagliarani has already pointed out the peculiarity of Bemporad’s reading. The two met in Viserba in 1938 when they were both teenagers:

Ebbi la ventura di incontrare nella prima adolescenza una Pizia adolescente, autentica sacerdotessa di Apollo (si misurava già con Omero) musicale fin negli ingorghi più intrigati delle viscere, come chiariva subito la sua voce; [...] Giovanna Bemporad mi declamava “Felicità raggiunta fra i capanni/ o ‘Sbarbaro, estroso fanciullo’ I più facili epigrammi / le notti estive a spiaggia in mezzo ai corpi degli amanti ‘ E certo mi declamava soprattutto “Il canto di un pastore errante”, e ancora mi declamava “Il canto di un pastore errante’ quella volta che fummo colpiti dalla Military Police con abbaglianti e canilupo alle tre e mezza di notte sulla spiaggia del Lido di Venezia l’estate del ‘46 [...] Nel ‘44 o ‘45 Giovanna ebbe occasione di declamare nel Veneto il *Faust* nell’originale tedesco davanti a un plotone d’esecuzione tedesco: anche quelli riconobbero la Pizia...”⁷⁹

While remembering Bemporad’s readings of Leopardi, Montale and Goethe, Pagliarani made Bemporad a symbol of Ancient Greece, the interpreter of the Pythian oracle herself. Her literary precocity is stressed in the adjective *adolescente*. While Bemporad referred to herself as a *Vestale della poesia*, hinting at the religious dimension of her devotion to poetry, here Pagliarani suggests a comparison with the prophetic and maniac obsession experienced by the oral poets described in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.⁸⁰ The reference to the poetic frenzy underlines the oral dimension of Bemporad’s relationship with poetry and simultaneously implies that the poetic word held a daimonic function for her. Pagliarani’s remarks on the inherent musicality and on the clarity of her voice should be read in connection with the fact that Bemporad changed her voice when reading, as if seized by

⁷⁸ The importance attributed by Pasolini to dramatic skills in teaching clearly emerges from his *Diario di un insegnante* now in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Romanzi e racconti*, II vols., I, 1946-1961, eds. Walter Siti, Silvia De Laude (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 1334-1337.

⁷⁹ Elio Pagliarani, “Quando lei mi leggeva Montale”, *Paese Sera*, 4th March 1981 now in Giovanna Bemporad, *Esercizi vecchi e nuovi* (Milan: Edizioni Archivio Dedalus, 2010), pp.207-208.

⁸⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245a in *Ancient Literary Criticism. The Principal Texts in New Translations* ed. by D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: OUP, 1972), p. 75. On poetic madness see E.R. Dodds, *The Blessing of Madness in The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 64-101.

supernatural forces.⁸¹

In the school, her lessons knew no time limit. The *comunione letteraria* involved students and teachers alike:

Facevano scuola di mattina. Il pomeriggio passeggiavano per i campi: un gran parlare di poesia e libri, ma ancora di più, come fra giovani di buone letture, della vita e della morte. La morte era una presenza ossessiva, obbligata, manieristica, nell'immaginario di Giovanna. [...] A cena, in casa – Giovanna mangiava con i Pasolini, e dormiva presso alcuni loro parenti, - era una gara a scrivere *vilote*. Pier Paolo ne dettava una via l'altra. Insegnavano ai loro studenti quelle canzoni. Altro divertimento: - amavano entrambi il Foscolo: delle *Grazie* versificavano le parti incompiute. E fra i due era un punto d'onore scrivere il perfetto endecasillabo: più legata al formalismo neoclassico Giovanna, più libero nell'invenzione Pier Paolo. Si dicevano l'un l'altro che sarebbero stati i poeti della loro generazione. [...] Una delle *vilote* scritte da lui diceva: *Zovinuta bianca e rosa /Con chel stras di vestidin /La to musa dolorosa/ A someja al me destin*. Giovanna Bemporad aveva dettato la musica per altre due quartine, dedicate ai cinquecento anni della parrocchia di Casarsa. [...] Musica profana, sempre della Bemporad, per quest'altra quartina: [...].⁸²

Afternoon and evening walks with the students enhanced the collective dimension of the *cenacolo letterario* of which the school was part. In particular, the endless discussions on poetry *en plein air* symbolically recall the dialogical dimension of learning in Socrates' Greece. Through the exercise of composing *vilote* (a traditional polyphonic song with a variety of metrics, dating back to the XV century), the teachers encouraged the students' creativity. The playful dimension is also linked to classical authors: the passion of Bemporad and Pasolini for Foscolo results in metrical competitions. The remark on Bemporad's devotion to the hendecasyllable is very interesting. Indeed, she was to stay committed to this canonical measure for her entire life. This passage also reveals the interplay between the didactic activity and Bemporad's and Pasolini's poetic inventiveness. In this kind of

⁸¹ An example to see how Bemporad changed her own voice when performing her translations can be found at < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlQg2oFQPIM>. > [Accessed on 9 April 2016].

⁸² Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini*, pp. 81-83. In the course of my recent archival research, I discovered that Bemporad translated Greek tragedies during that period. These translations helped shape her poetic image of death and offered the possibility of exploring the archetype. Such an influence on Bemporad's poetic imagery, hitherto unknown as the translations have not yet been published, is discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. On Bemporad's musical skills see also Francesca Cadel, *La lingua dei desideri: il dialetto secondo Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Lecce: Manni, 2002), p. 254, p. 261 and p. 264.

environment, Bemporad's teaching freed the Classics and their legacy from the penalizing constraints of the institutional school.

Bemporad staged a play of sorts where she herself performed as a modern rhapsode, allowing the students-audience to experience every text as an ancient text. Thanks to her amazing mnemonic powers, Bemporad could perform long extracts and capture the students' attention for a prolonged time, as in ancient ritual performance. Her mnemotechnic skills were indeed an essential part of her way of working. Bemporad herself confessed that while translating and composing poetry she constantly read aloud the passages translated in order to hear the sounds of her verses and in order to possess the oral dimension of the poetry.

The role of educator/performer assumed by Bemporad in Casarsa would continue after the school. Bemporad devoted her entire life to poetic translation and performative readings of the Classics both as a means of self-education and as a means to enact the communal experience of poetry. Although Bemporad's experience as a teacher was brief and was unique in her life, her time as a teacher of Latin and Greek in Casarsa is crucial in her trajectory as a verbal artist and a most active defender of the classics within the modern tradition.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the translations of Greek tragedy, the poetic opus, the poetics and the didactic activity of Camillo Sbarbaro and Giovanna Bemporad. By comparatively addressing these crucial aspects of the poets' work together, I have traced the influence of their translations of Greek tragedies on their poetics and on their creative work as a whole, and thus demonstrated the key role played by Classical legacy in their poetic worlds. Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's experiences as teachers of Classics drew extensively on their activities as translators as well as from their poetic agendas, thus charging the triad of Classics, poetry and translation with pedagogical commitment. Assuming that translation of Greek tragedies functions as a case study of their wider translation activities, I have identified a common denominator among their works as translators, poets and teachers.

Besides exploring shared traits, I demonstrated that Sbarbaro and Bemporad had each very original translation methodologies and pedagogical ideas on the classics, and analysed each author as an individual case. My analysis of their views on the role of education and poetry in the transmission of classical literature is a novel contribution to the existing scholarly work on Sbarbaro and Bemporad.

I have conducted my study by taking into account specimens of two Greek tragedies: Sophocles' *Antigone* in Sbarbaro's translation and Sophocles' *Electra* in Bemporad's translation. My decision to examine these two authors comparatively stems from the consideration that they share essential aesthetic principles, locating translation in the realm of art rather than academic scholarship. Although both poets were very familiar with the Greek language and had a firm grasp of philology and linguistics, the textual analysis of their versions has shown how they both dismissed an hyper-philological translation and rejected any form of academicism.

I discussed Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's engagement with Greek tragedy from three perspectives. The first highlights to what degree their poetic translations of Greek tragedy relate to the trends and approaches to translation in their historical context. The second addresses the poets' translation methodologies. The third unravels the process by which their translation experience interweaves with their lyrical production and, ultimately, reflects on their poetics and shaping of poetic personae.

In the Italian *Novecento* the reception of Greek tragedy was mainly addressed in the wake of Aestheticism, as I have discussed in chapter 1 of the present work. Such an approach led to the creation of the *Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico* (INDA), a turning point in the reception of Greek tragedy both for its ideology and its impact. By staging Greek tragedies in the Greek theatre of Syracuse as cultural events structured after ancient competitions, the organizers of the INDA aimed at resetting Greek tragedy in its original social, cultural and ritual context. These representations placed great emphasis on the recreation of the artistic triad of music, dance and poetry, revealing an intellectual debt to the speculation on the origin of Greek tragedy, with particular reference to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, of which D'Annunzio and Romagnoli had been the principal mediators. In terms of impact, these yearly competitions prompted an unprecedented number of translations of Greek tragedies. This significant outpouring of translations and representations of Greek tragedy was not paired with any theoretical speculation on the scope of literary translation of dramatic texts. Similarly, no study on the rendering of the cultural and non-verbal implications every translation of performance was offered. I highlighted how poets, together with classicists and theatre directors, promoted interest in Greek tragedy, drawing inspiration for their own dramatic art or fostering classicizing aesthetics and poetics. Taking Gabriele D'Annunzio's and Edoardo Sanguineti's positions on Greek tragedy as the starting and end points, I examined the breadth of this scenario in the

first chapter of this thesis with two objectives: 1. offering an historical context for Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's translations; 2. highlighting how the "Italian approach" to the legacy of Greek tragedy and, more broadly, the Classical civilisation, is indebted to the European debate on objectives of classical scholarship. My overview showed that the majority of 20th century Italian translators of Greek tragedy (classicists, amateurs, poets and theatre directors) all translated Greek tragedies merely for performance purposes.

My analysis has shown that Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's translations, on the contrary, are disengaged from any theatrical commitment. Theirs are poetic versions of Sophocles' plays and as such their focus is entirely intended to bring out linguistic characteristics of the original. In addition, the analysis of their translations demonstrated that their contribution to the reception of Greek tragedy is equally disentangled from any ideological filter or conceptual category.

As I have shown in chapter 2, Sbarbaro fostered a *poetica dell'aderenza* for his translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, an approach which was put into practice through a staunchly literal translation. Sbarbaro's choice of prose allowed him great liberty from formal constraints. However, he was keen to reproduce the word order of the original. The openness of prose and the adherence to the verbal fabric of the Greek created a most original oxymoron. Sbarbaro's desire to adhere to the original stemmed from his reverence towards the Greek tragedians, as I demonstrated through an analysis of some relevant letters. At the heart of his 'bare' approach was the belief that Sophoclean poetry had a core, which would reveal itself only by a word-by-word translation. In so doing, Sbarbaro charged Sophoclean poetry with a somewhat Biblical aura, that of sacred revelation. Yet, Sbarbaro did not entirely renounce the freedom of intervention. His use of prose, therefore, is not as naïf as one would think. This becomes particularly evident when one considers how Sbarbaro enhances the tone of some ironic passages present in the *Antigone*

(especially in the dialogues) thus modifying the register of the original. His strict respect of the Greek word order in the lyrical section sometimes stretches Italian syntax to its limits.

In contrast, as I have shown in chapter 3, Bemporad professed that she believed in the *tradizione filologico-umanistica*, according to which there had to be found a perfect solution (*una resa felice*) out of a set of variants.¹ My study of Bemporad's translation of Sophocles' *Electra* has shown this quest for a *resa felice*, which she would only later theorize in her essay on Homer's *Odyssey* (1989). In contrast to Sbarbaro, in her translation of Sophocles, Bemporad chose the closed measure of the hendecasyllable, the very same metre she used for her own poetry and for the majority of her poetic translations. Bemporad's choice of the hendecasyllable is an obvious mark of her poetic engagement with the translation of Sophocles. My study of Bemporad's 'tragic' hendecasyllables has shown, especially in the lyrical sections, a tendency towards the expansion of rhythmical units beyond their syllabic constraints, through an extensive use of enjambments and vocalic endings. Bemporad this way overcame the verse constraints by exploiting the hendecasyllable rhythmical potential. In this practice, I identified Bemporad's desire to reproduce Electra's endless lament, the main theme of the play itself. Furthermore Bemporad's metrical rendition served to create a different word order. The dislocation of certain key words – due to metrical needs – in contrast with the original disposition offered Bemporad the possibility to redesign the structure of the text according to her own poetic sensibility. From a position of limited freedom, imposed by the metrical structure, Bemporad stretched her creative imagination and found herself exposed to possibilities otherwise unknown.

My analysis revealed that both Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's translation

¹ Giovanna Bemporad, *La traduzione dell'Odisea* in *La traduzione del testo poetico* ed. by Buffoni (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1989), pp. 239-241.

methodologies are inspired and ruled by an element of constraint. Within the space of a given structure, they both devised strategies to overcome its limits and use it as a creative resource and a means of exploring new meanings, making translation into an inventive and poetically inspiring activity.

The second aspect I examined comparatively is the influence exerted by Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's translations of Greek tragedy on their own poetic works and on their poetics.

In my study I have shown how Sbarbaro, to describe his task as a translator, developed a metaphor which he then extended to his poetic activity as a whole: the metaphor of the translator *che cammina sulla corda*. This image chiefly expresses a sense of adherence to the text and the limited freedom of expression that he felt he had when translating Greek tragedy. The necessity of 'walking on a rope' acquired a symbolic meaning and stimulated a wider reflection on the aim of his poetry and on his poetic awareness. The image was subsequently developed into another powerful metaphor, that of *scrittura sotto dettatura*, which opens Sbarbaro's declaration of poetics in the *Fuochi fatui*, a zibaldone of metapoetic meditation and remarks on the activity of translation. The poet who writes *sotto dettatura* expresses that very same constraint experienced by the translator who *cammina sulla corda*, establishing a parallel between Sbarbaro as a translator of Greek tragedy and Sbarbaro as a poet. Moreover, in *Fuochi fatui*, he declares that he has understood the meaning of his poetic quest and asserts his desire to reconnect with his beginnings, namely with his first collection of poems, *Pianissimo*. The translation of *Antigone* has another important connection with Sbarbaro's poetic universe. Echoes of *Pianissimo* are particularly present in it. Specifically, the image of his need for tears, as a metaphor for the constant quest for life in an alienated Self, is fully expressed in his translation of *Antigone*, thus creating a strong connection between Sbarbaro's poetic

themes and those of Greek tragedy.

A critical aspect of my analysis revealed that Bemporad's translation of Sophocles was a key moment in the development of her poetic persona. The myth of *Electra* profoundly fascinated Bemporad. Her main interest in Electra's character appears from her decision to translate, out of the trilogy of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, only the *Libation Bearers* (which focuses on Electra) and, subsequently, Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*, which largely drew from Sophocles' interpretation of Electra. In particular, there is one aspect of Electra that captured Bemporad's attention and inspired her to draw a parallel with her poetic self. In Sophocles' play, the character of Electra is to be read always together with her other constitutive half, her brother Orestes. Electra, until the very end of the play, lives as half a human being, always longing to reunite with her brother. The only solace she can find are her lament and the hymns to death she sings. This figure of a character who lives a half life is, I have argued, what intrigued Bemporad. In my analysis of the *Diari* – a section of Bemporad's *Esercizi* – I have shown how, similarly to *Electra*, Bemporad's poetic persona is constantly longing to reunite with her other constitutive half, her 'forma sorella', that is poetry. My comparative analysis of Bemporad's translation of Electra and of her *Esercizi* has demonstrated how the endless lament and the constant desire of death experienced by the poetic self, especially in the *Diari*, are profoundly indebted to Electra's condition. The tragic heroine, her endless quest for the other half, her nightly terrors consoled only by her hymns to death – this is all to be read as a set of metaphors for Bemporad's endless longing to be reunited with poetry. Moreover, a number of symbols and personifications of Death in the *Diari*, such as Shadow (*Ombra*), Darkness (*Tenebra*) and Night (*Notte*) shape Bemporad's constant desire for death after the model of Electra. Adopting the Leopardian model of translation of the Classics as poetic apprenticeship, Bemporad not only finalised her poetic

themes and shaped her poetic persona, but indeed made her translation of Sophocles a milestone of her poetic trajectory.

The most important aspect that emerged from this study is that both Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's engagement with Greek tragedy appears most evidently in the interplay between their translations and original poetry. Also, I have argued that their appropriation of the Classics as sources of poetry was deeply connected with their experiences and commitments as teachers.

Sbarbaro's lifelong teaching activity must be immediately placed under the sign of anarchy: the poet categorically refused to be part of any schooling institution. Such a decision was informed by a precise ideology: Sbarbaro strongly opposed the scholastic system, as he believed that it was an obstacle to a real learning experience. However, Sbarbaro's radical view on learning was not an *a priori* rejection of the system as a whole, but was indeed informed by his own schooling experience. By choosing to be a private tutor Sbarbaro had the opportunity to develop his own pedagogy in opposition to the institutional one. His *metodo della partecipazione* and his strong dialogical approach, tailored to the needs of the individual students (Sbarbaro only taught one-to-one), aimed at fostering a learning experience of mutual enrichment based on the direct knowledge of Classical poetry. Conceived in those terms, Sbarbaro's teaching activity was a highly ethical stance. The poet as a teacher revived the study of Classical civilisation as a means to promote self-awareness and awaken the individual's creative responsiveness. Sbarbaro's peculiar way of finding, step by step, the most adequate pedagogy for every student, somewhat recalls the poetic process of finding, word by word, the right solution for every composition. The parallel between poetry and teaching produced actual intersection. Significantly, Sbarbaro included his reflections on teaching in his poetic collections, which stresses all the more clearly the creative function he assigned to the knowledge of the

Classics.

Bemporad's experience as a teacher appears to be radically different from that of Sbarbaro. While Sbarbaro taught almost his entire life, Bemporad was a teacher of Latin and Greek only for a few months. The uniqueness of her experience as a teacher is mostly due to the context wherein she taught. Bemporad was a teacher at Pier Paolo Pasolini's private school. Differently from Sbarbaro's one-to-one lessons, Bemporad had an entire class to teach and lived together with teachers and students in a sort of commune where the learning experience was constantly revived in a number of manners (metrical competitions, walks, theatrical projects and poetic compositions). A key element in Bemporad's methodology as a teacher is the use of dramatic art and translation. In line with Pasolini's theoretical writing on the importance of the theatre in pedagogy, Bemporad was a performer-teacher. Her lessons focused on dramatic readings of her own translations. As a teacher of Classics, Bemporad put great emphasis on the oral dimension of literature (a model of delivery she would use till the end of her life). In her lessons/performances, she acted out by heart long extracts of her translations of the Classics. It has emerged that teaching Classics in Pasolini's school was, above all, a poetic experience for Bemporad: the transmission of classical poetry allowed her to change into a modern rhapsode.

Ultimately, my analysis of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's pedagogical commitment has revealed that their teaching aimed to free the Classics from that aura of conformism associated with the traditional method of teaching Greek and Latin at schools. In different ways and with different agendas, both poets developed a teaching approach in which translation held a creative role and was employed as a means of exalting the poetic function of the Classics. In so doing, the use of translation in their pedagogic work demonstrates awareness of the inspiration they took from their translations of Greek tragedy.

This study of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic translations of Greek tragedy

enriches the ever growing field of study interrogating the dialogue of Twentieth century Italian poetry with Classical legacy.² From a stylistic point of view, my analysis of their engagement with Greek tragedians revealed how both poets investigated the lyrical possibilities of the tragic genre by means of translation. At the same time, their translations of Sophocles helped their lyrical voices and provided models for their poetic personae.

My findings allow for a reassessment of Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's poetic models and influences. For the first time in Sbarbaro's scholarship, I suggested we read his rare declaration of poetics in relation to his translation practice and, specifically, in relation to his interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Moreover, as I have shown for the first time, Sbarbaro's didactic engagement with Sophocles sheds new light on his own poetry. At this point, one feels the need for a comprehensive study of all of his translations from the Classics and the interplay with his poetic universe.

Bemporad is yet another case. This author remains almost entirely neglected and largely unpublished. My discovery of a whole corpus of translations of Greek tragedies in her archive – totally ignored so far by critics and publishers – calls for future extensive research both on the relationship between Greek tragedy and her work as a poet, and on her contribution to the history of 20th-century Italian translations of Greek tragedy. Due to space constraints, I was able to offer only one interpretative transcription – that of Sophocles' *Electra* – and focussed my analysis on that tragedy. The remarkable number of tragedies translated by Bemporad, which still remain entirely unpublished, and the influence exerted by these translations on her creative work spur us to broaden our understanding of Bemporad's work beyond her published translations of ancient epics and to take full stock of her importance as a poet-translator in the Italian 20th-century canon.

² A recent contribution to the *status quo* of scholarship on Classical legacy and Italian poetry has been offered by the miscellaneous volume «*Un compito infinito*». *Testi classici e traduzioni d'autore nel Novecento italiano*, ed. by F. Condello and A. Rodighiero (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2015).

Within the endless debate on the role and function of the Classics in the modern world, Sbarbaro's and Bemporad's relationship with the classics appears oriented towards an appreciation of the poetic function. Choosing poetic translation as the key activity to shape their dialogue with Greek tragedians, Sbarbaro and Bemporad enhanced the intrinsic dialogical nature of both the tragic genre and translation.

Bibliography

List of Abbreviations

BUR: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli

CEI: Conferenza Episcopale Italiana

CUP: Cambridge University Press

ERI: Edizioni RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana

OUP: Oxford University Press

TAPhA: Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association

Audio Visual Material

Omero, *Odissea*, adaptation by Giovanna Bemporad, preface by Giovanni Battista Pighi, screenplay and dialogues by Giampiero Bona, Vittorio Bonicelli, Fabio Carpi, Luciano Codignola, Mario Prospero, Renzo Rosso for RAI TV co-production, Ortf, Bavaria and Dino De Laurentis (Turin: ERI, 1968)

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