Translating the Italian Element in Riccardo Cavaliere's *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore*: An Introduction to *A Young Director: Mr Heart*

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Riccardo Cavaliere (1984–) is an emerging Italian writer from Cremona, Lombardy. His writing brings together poetry and prose and takes the reader across time, space and generations. He started writing the novella *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore* (*A Young Director: Mr Heart*) in Italian twenty years ago, beginning with the poems and adding the prose afterwards. This novella is part of a wider collection centred around family relationships and generations entitled *Morale della favola* (*The Moral of the Story*).

Cavaliere developed *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore* around the poems included in it, expanding on themes and characters. The novella is set in two unspecified Italian cities and opens with a poem dedicated to the narrator’s father. The poem introduces the father-son relationship, which is a central theme in *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore* and in *Morale della favola*. The main character is Paolo, who, at the beginning of the story, is the son in the relationship. The story is narrated from his point of view in first person past tense and it opens with a young Paolo playing with his sister Chiara and his brother Mario. The story encompasses tales of the violence inflicted by Paolo’s father on the family and closes with a flash-forward: ten years after Paolo becomes a father and analyses his own fatherhood, asking his child for forgiveness.

Dreams are included in the narration and contribute to the creation of uncertain chronotopical dimensions. All three of Cavaliere’s short stories in *Morale della favola* present dreams and links between one story and the next as well as links between the different generations of fathers and their roles. “Rielaborazioni automatiche,” the fourth chapter of *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore*, is an example of how the author uses vagueness of time and space to analyse the father-son relationship.
This entire chapter is a dream Paolo has. Chapters and passages like *Rielaborazioni automatiche* give the narrator the opportunity to jump through time and space, presenting different points of view on the main theme.

**THE TRANSLATION OF IL PICCOLO REGISTA: MR CUORE**

I stumbled upon the e-book version of *Morale della favola* online, during the summer months of 2016, and fell in love with the main character, his story, and Cavaliere’s writing. What struck me the most as a reader was the way in which generations communicate and how Cavaliere was able to compare these generations by showing different points of view in the stories that compose *Morale della favola*. I was enticed by the idea of translating the stories into English, as I thought they were “very Italian”—intrinsically Italian—full of culture-specific elements which would present a challenge. I contacted the author and enquired if he had thought about having the collection of short stories translated into English. The author was keen for his stories to be told to an English-speaking public. He also mentioned wanting to create a slightly different version of the first story in *Morale della favola*, as this had been written twenty years ago and he wanted to update it.

I commenced analysing *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore* that same summer and translating not long after. Author and translator worked closely together during all the phases of the translation of *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore*. During the analytical phase, I suggested adopting a translation strategy which would attempt to maintain Italian culture-specific elements as well as Cavaliere’s writing peculiarities in the English version. Cavaliere agreed with the strategy, suggested making the setting more clear in the English version, and even wrote a new passage for it. The title of the English version—*A Young Director: Mr Heart*—was agreed upon after completing the translation and during the proofreading phase.

**THEORIES INFORMING THE TRANSLATION STRATEGY**

According to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), either a translator leaves the author in peace and moves the reader towards the author, or they move the author towards the reader.¹ This dichotomy still rings true in contemporary literary translation. Schleiermacher’s preference was for the adoption of the first strategy. According to him, a genuine translator would want to bring those two people “truly together,”² without mediation on behalf of the translator. This willingness to bring author and reader together, and to make the reader embark on a journey towards the author’s culture, in this case the Italian culture, is behind my translation strategy.
Further developing Schleiermacher’s dichotomy, Venuti famously theorises the existence of two poles a translator may head towards: “domestication” and “foreignisation.” Domestication prioritises the receiving culture and language, its norms and its *realia*: culture-specific elements. In a domesticating translation, *realia* are adapted, and substituted with elements which are part of the receiving culture. To the latter pole, foreignisation, belong those translators who prioritise the stylistic peculiarities of the original and attempt to maintain them, together with *realia*, in their translations. Far from representing binary oppositions, domestication and foreignisation are to be seen as a continuum. In fact, a whole range of translating choices lie between domestication and foreignisation. While emphasising that these are not dichotomous poles, we must recognise that translators need to make an *a priori* choice, an “initial norm” in the words of Toury, before commencing the translation. This choice guides the decisional process of translation at a micro level.

In the case of *A Young Director: Mr Heart*, I chose, in agreement with the author, to adopt a foreignising translation—a translation that would not only adhere, as closely as possible, to the meaning, style and images present in the original, but would also attempt to replicate the themes, traditions and folklore emerging from Cavaliere’s writing. Thus elements of Otherness to the English reader, of Italianness, have been preserved in the translation of the novel. For instance, Italian culture-specific elements are included in the English translation in Italian and are signalled to the reader in italics. These can be divided into three categories. The first category of *realia* presents both the Italian name in italics and a brief explanation in the body of the text: *padre padrone*, for instance, is accompanied by “authoritative father”; *borgata* is explained as “the disjoined community in the outskirts of the city”; *colonia* as an Italian holiday camp. The second category contains terms such as *nonno*, *piazza*, *vicoli* or *pizzaiolo*, which are more easily understood and do not present any explanation in the text. The third category encompasses names of places in the novella, such as *Via del Corso*, which are left untranslated.

Maintaining elements of Italianness in *A Young Director: Mr Heart* allows me to “preserve [them] as the expression of a different culture: ... an extremely enriching experience for the reader.” As Franca Cavagnoli teaches us, “from the enthralling and mysterious voyage along the border representing the territory of translation and the relationship between one’s own culture and the culture of the Other germinates the possibility of reciprocal fecundation and evolution.”

Cavagnoli’s reflections on translation echo both Salman Rushdie’s thoughts that “something can be gained in translation,” as well as Octavio Paz’s paradox:
translation both suppresses the differences between one language and another and, at the same time, it shows them even more obviously. Thanks to translation we discover what our neighbours say and think or rather, write in a different manner compared to us. It was with these concepts in mind that I approached the translation of *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore*. I intended to maintain Cavaliere’s prolific writing as the expression of Otherness, the expression of a different culture, one that thinks, says and writes in a different manner.

An attempt to carry Cavaliere’s elaborate writing style across to the English language is also present in *A Young Director: Mr Heart*. Cavaliere’s long descriptive sentences and his detailed descriptions, so intrinsically Italian, are maintained in their length in the English translation. Due to stylistic differences between the two languages, this was a challenging aspect of the foreignising translation. Nonetheless, one that was worth the attempt in order to “stain” the English syntax with elements of Italian prose. An example of this is the use of short sharp descriptions which following the pattern: one noun, plus one adjective between commas and present alliterations, such as: “il sorriso strappato e la lacrima asciugata” or “testa bassa e passo spedito,” rendered with “a snatched smile and a wiped tear” and “head down and fast pace.” This is where Cavaliere’s poetry surfaces through the prose and where maintaining his technique in translation is pivotal.

A new passage on Rome—completely absent from the original—has been added to the English version to give it more precise chronotopic details and to add to the Italianisation of the English version, in an experiment closer to creative writing than literary translation. This passage, written by Cavaliere for the English version of *Il piccolo regista: Mr Cuore*, together with other chronotopic hints that the story is set between the Italian capital and Cavaliere’s town of Cremona, have been written for the English translation as part of the Italianising strategy adopted in the translation of this novella. The passage is rich in culture-specific elements.

*A Young Director: Mr Heart* maintains a close relationship to its Italian original, emphasising their mutual relationship of dependence. As Derrida first noted, “original and translation owe a debt to each other; they also owe a mutual dependence and survival once the translation act or Babelian performance has taken place.” A *Young Director: Mr Heart* thus acquires different nuances absent from the Italian original and becomes an experiment in literary translation and creative writing.

As recently as 2016, Venuti discussed world literature and translation from minority languages, and pondered whether
the changing global literary hierarchy develop in a distinctive way if translators view their work as a form of creative writing, comparable to original composition, immersed in the source language and culture but focused on the release of literary or aesthetic effects in the receiving situation.10

Literary translation is seen in this experiment as a chance to maintain Cavaliere’s aesthetic, stylistic peculiarities, and writing technique, as well as the Italian realia present in his novella, across the barrier of the English language.

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Anna has written articles on Translation Studies and Second Language Acquisition published in peer-reviewed journals such as AALITRA: The Australian Association for Literary Translation, JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, JUTLP: Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, and others. Anna has attended and presented at translation and language teaching and learning conferences in Australia, Europe and Canada. She has been teaching and coordinating units of Translation Studies, Italian Studies and Spanish Studies at The University of Western Australia since 2012, and is a NAATI certified professional translator from English into Italian. She currently co-ordinates the Master of Translation Studies at UWA.

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NOTES
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 125–150.
6 Ibid.