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ROSA DEL CONTE'S "ART OF TRANSLATION" BETWEEN CRITICISM AND PRACTICE¹

Rosa Del Conte was an eminent philologist, critic and translator. She is especially referred to as the author of the well-known essay *Mihai Eminescu o dell'Assoluto* [*Mihai Eminescu or About the Absolute*], acknowledged by M. Eliade as "the most extensive foreign-language monograph dedicated to Mihai Eminescu"². However, the intellectual experience of Del Conte cannot be reduced to a single title or less, to her professorship at an important Italian university.

The intense promotion and dispersion of Romanian culture in Italy carried out by the Romanian language and literature professor at the University of Rome are not limited to her professional, didactic commitment to her students, nor to the diligence with which she committed herself to the study of history and literary criticism. In fact, consistent with her own *officium*, Rosa Del Conte transformed her intellectual and academic experience into a sustainable laboratory of knowledge and interpretation. Her entire formation, research and reflection constitute a complex and ambitious critical exercise. The result is the profound and multi-faceted knowledge of her research field.

Her desire to reach this aim is clearly visible in Rosa Del Conte's bidimensional intellect. In her work she is capable of combining the complementary skills of both the philologist and the literary critic. This duality manifests itself in her informed literary translations where she successfully merges art and science.

The dialectic of the two components of Rosa Del Conte's classical training, philology and literary criticism, crystallizes in the application of such knowledge to the field of translation. In her opinion, a good translation is actually based on "a

¹ This contribution was occasioned by the Summer School for PhD and Master students and young philology researchers entitled "The faces of irony in literature and criticism", organized by BBU (Faculty of Letters, Department of Romanian Literature and Literary Theory) and The Ipotești Memorial House and National Center for Eminescu Studies, on 30 June 2020. The development and in-depth approach of this study were rendered possible by consulting the Del Conte Archive, preserved by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. My research internships were carried out under the aegis of the Toniolo Institute, which provided me with the materials in the Del Conte Archive and Collections.

² Mircea Eliade, "Postfață" ["Postface"], in Rosa Del Conte, *Eminescu sau despre Absolut* [*Eminescu or about the Absolute*]. Edition and preface by Marian Papahagi, foreword by Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, postface by Mircea Eliade, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1990, p. 454: "cea mai vastă monografie închinată, într-o limbă străină, lui Mihai Eminescu".

philologically correct reading trace”³.

It is in this spirit that we must read the renowned article published in *Belfagor* and entitled “Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi” [“The Unfaithful Uglies or Quasimodo, Interpreter of Arghezi”]⁴, which, as F. Donatiello acknowledges in a recent study entitled “Salvatore Quasimodo traduttore di Tudor Arghezi” [“Salvatore Quasimodo, translator of Tudor Arghezi”]⁵, is dedicated to a “case of *auteur* translation not influenced by philological concerns”⁶. Donatiello states that “Quasimodo conceives literary translation as an anti-academic operation, strongly connected to poetic subjectivity”⁷. Professor Del Conte comes to a seemingly similar conclusion; however, she does not appreciate this kind of approach and harshly criticises the attempt to achieve a “transposition of the poetic universe”⁸ of the Arghezian writings aimed for the Italian cultural and linguistic space.

My aim is not to propose an *a posteriori* “value judgement” regarding Quasimodo’s Arghezian translations. I would rather exploit Rosa Del Conte’s short essay in order to extrapolate a second level of reading, one that develops from the expression contained in the title: “le brutte infedeli” [“the unfaithful uglies”]⁹. Therefore, my focus will not be on *the quality of the translations*, but on *the intrinsic meaning of the act of translation*, and on *the deontology of translation*¹⁰.

My goal will be to highlight the role that such significant turns of phrasing play in the construction of a scientific and literary discourse which, surprisingly, finds its own keywords in the use of antiphrasis, irony and sarcasm¹¹.

³ Rosa Del Conte, “Premessa”, in Mihai Eminescu, *Poesie*. Edited by Rosa Del Conte, Modena – Madrid, Mucchi – Fundación Cultural Rumana, 1989, p. VII: “una traccia di lettura filologicamente corretta e, grazie al lungo esercizio critico sull’autore, anche sul piano interpretativo sicura”.

⁴ Rosa Del Conte, “Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi”, *Belfagor*, 1966, 31 luglio, 4, pp. 471-482.

⁵ Federico Donatiello, «Salvatore Quasimodo traduttore di Tudor Arghezi», in Teresa Franco et Cecilia Piantanida (eds.), *Echoing Voices in Italian Literature: Tradition and Translation in the 20th Century*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 202-216.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 202: “caso di traduzione d’autore non influenzata da preoccupazioni filologiche”.

⁷ *Ibidem*: “Quasimodo concepisce la traduzione letteraria come un’operazione antiaccademica e fortemente legata alla soggettività poetica”.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 213: “trasposizione dell’universo poetico”

⁹ Given the origin of the expression used in translation studies “le brelle infedeli” [“the unfaithful beauties”], I align to the solution adopted by Fredrick Burwick, “Romantic Theories of Translation”, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 39, 2008, 3, pp. 68-74.

¹⁰ In an article published in 2011, D. Condrea Derer emphasizes the existence of a deontology of the act of translation and of the literary criticism. Doina Condrea-Derer, “Dezamăgirile Rosei Del Conte” [“Rosa de Conte’s Dissapointments”], *Orizzonti culturali italo-romeni*, 2011, 1, http://www.orizonturicultural.ro/ro_studii_Doina-Derer-despre-Rosa-del-Conte.html. Accessed July 10, 2021.

¹¹ The debate opened by Rosa Del Conte can certainly be read as an interesting example of the use of irony as a tool. Irony is a tool that Salvatore Quasimodo also uses in countering the criticism levelled

Rosa Del Conte and her Archive

Rosa Del Conte is a fascinating and many-sided figure. She was born at the beginning of the 20th century (1907), in Voghera, and she lived through the whole "secolo breve", departing this life at the age of 104 in Rome. Hers was a humanistic education. She specialised in literature, philology and philosophy. After graduating from a classical high school, she completed her studies at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Milan on October 30, 1931, with a thesis in philosophy coordinated by professor A. Banfi. The title of her thesis was *La critica di Renato Serra* [*Renato Serra's Criticism*]¹².

Her encounter with Romania occurred approximately a decade later. After having taught for a few years and qualified as a high school teacher, Rosa Del Conte applied to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to teach abroad. She passed the selection in 1939, thus starting teaching Italian in Romania (1942). She lived there for six years, at first in Bucharest, where she started collaborating with the Italian Studies Department of the University (1946), and later on in Cluj, where she moved in the autumn of the following year.

She finally moved back to Italy in 1948: as a consequence of the proclamation of the Popular Republic of Romania, the Ministry of Public Education terminated the contracts of the foreign teaching staff employed by Universities. Her return marked a turning point in Rosa Del Conte's existential and educational path and academic career. Upon returning home, she focused on the study and teaching of Romanian language and literature in Milan and Rome. The Romanian experience was for Rosa Del Conte a double learning laboratory. It was an apprenticeship that allowed her to develop and emphasise, on the one hand, her double nature, namely that of a translator and a literary critic and, on the other hand, her skills as a scholar in Italian and Romanian studies. The entire intellectual activity of Rosa Del Conte combines the Italian cultural underlay with the Romanian overlay. Her education is rooted in her classical formation, which gave her – first and foremost – a working methodology. The "Romanian turn" of her maturity was grafted on this. It flourished on this philological underlay. Nonetheless, there can be no talk of two clear-cut and independent cultural moments; in fact, every page written by Rosa Del Conte, as well as her university courses, are a testament to the profoundly intertwined nature of these two elements, indicative of this cognitive duality which, in her view, constituted a *continuum*.

Her personal library and archive, donated in 2012 to the Giuseppe Toniolo

at him. In this particular context, irony fits into the repertoire of rhetoric, finding an effective means of expression in the antiphrasis.

¹² For bibliographic information, see "Busta 3, Archivio 1, Fondo Del Conte". Renato Serra (1884–1915) was an important Italian literary critic and writer of traditional and national orientation of the early 20th century. In his works, later critics identified elements of *critica stilistica* (stylistic criticism).

Institute (Università Cattolica, Milan) are the mirror of her intellectual path and of her interests. The Del Conte collection, as an example of transversality and interdisciplinarity, represents the synthesis of the desire for knowledge that characterised her entire intellectual and cognitive journey. M.L. Pozzi notes an inclination towards universality when he describes the heterogeneous complexity of the materials preserved in the Del Conte library, ranging from literature to philosophy and to ethnographic studies, from the history of religions to mythology and theology¹³. What is now called “Fondo Del Conte” includes a library, a book collection of about 7350 volumes, and an archive which is quite complex structurally and where all of Rosa Del Conte’s *carte d’autore* (i.e. correspondence, documents, autographed volumes, handwritten and typewritten drafts of studies and translations etc.) are collected.

The archive containing the materials used for the preparation of this study was partially organised and systematised by Dr. Rizzi Bianchi and Dr. Dumbravă. P. Rizzi Bianchi created an inventory considered as a cultural fund, explaining its contents in detail. I must refer to this document in order to clarify the references present in the body of this study. The archive materials were organised “on three levels of use, corresponding to three types/typological situations”. The first organisational level (Archive 1) consists of “the correspondence and the documentary series”, namely documents, photographs and certificates. The second level (Archive 2) comprises “the organised cultural materials” not inventoried and partially arranged, plus the “intellectual products” of a different nature, divided into categories based on their contents: notes, notebooks, drafts, manuscripts and typewritten studies and translations. Finally, the third level (Archive 3) gathers the “minor study materials”, namely notes, programmes, preparation material characterised by a strong fragmentation¹⁴. The material I shall approach in the present study is thus part of the Book Collection and of Archives 2 and 3.

Del Conte-Quasimodo: A Controversy on the Translation of Poetry

Much of Rosa Del Conte’s academic training and career was related to translation, experienced from the position of a particularly attentive reader and a quite active translator¹⁵. As such, the archive holds an extensive bibliography and

¹³ Mattia Luigi Pozzi, “Viaggiare nell’archivio di Rosa Del Conte”, in Alvisse Andreose, Angelo Bianchi, Giovanni Gobber, Paolo Gresti (eds.), *Romeno-Balcanica*, Atti del Convegno internazionale I Giornata di Studio “Rosa Del Conte”, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2018, pp. 149-162.

¹⁴ Piero Rizzi Bianchi, *Fondo culturale italo-rumeno della Professoressa Rosa Del Conte*, Milano, marzo 2016, the inventory is accessible online:

http://opac.unicatt.it/search~S13*ita/cArchivio+Del+Conte+Rosa/carchivio+del+conte+rosa/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CE/frameset&FF=carchivio+del+conte+rosa&1%2C1%2C. Accessed June 21, 2021.

¹⁵ Some examples of volumes published by Rosa Del Conte: Rosa Del Conte, *Poeti italiani de azi: Eugenio Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo* [*Contemporary Italian Poets: Eugenio Montale, Salvatore*

various materials related to the subject of poetic translation.

I have therefore chosen to focus on a rather "striking" event in the intellectual-academic biography of Rosa Del Conte, namely the controversy related to poetry translation involving the poet Salvatore Quasimodo. In this context, the controversy surrounding the translation of Romanian poetry by the poet and Nobel winner Salvatore Quasimodo is a significant and rather revealing episode in the intellectual and academic biography of Rosa Del Conte¹⁶.

In 1966, the prominent Mondadori Publishing House published *Poesie* [*Poems*], a bilingual volume of more than 200 pages comprising a selection of poems by the celebrated Romanian author Tudor Arghezi, translated by Quasimodo¹⁷. According to Marco Dotti, who wrote "Per rompere il silenzio" ["Breaking the silence"]¹⁸, an afterword to the recent new edition of the volume, Quasimodo had worked on the translations from the beginning of the 1960s and finished them during a trip to Norway (1963).

The "hermeneutic" translation proposed by Quasimodo, who did not speak Romanian and worked on a literal rendition made by the journalist Dragos

Quasimodo], București, Tip. Bucovina I.E. Torouțiu, 1945; Elio Vittorini, *Oameni și neoameni – roman* [*Humans and Nonhumans. A Novel*]. Translated by Rosetta Del Conte, București, Editura de Stat, 1947; Tudor Arghezi, *Inno all'uomo*. Translated and commentary by Rosa Del Conte, Milano, Lerici Editore, 1967; Lucian Blaga, *Poesie (1919–1943)*. Translated and preface by Rosa del Conte, Milano, Lerici Editore, 1971; Lucian Blaga, *Mastro Manole*. Biographical note and translated by Rosa Del Conte, Roma, Tip. L. Morara, 1974; Tudor Arghezi, *Il borgo di cristallo*. Translated by Rosa Del Conte, Milano, Emme Edizioni, 1983 etc.

¹⁶ We shall not go into too much temporal-editorial-content details regarding the Del Conte-Quasimodo controversy, since Donatiello provided this information in the aforementioned study, as did Dotti in the 2004 publication. Broadly, the articles by Del Conte and Quasimodo that are part of this controversy are: Rosa Del Conte, "Tradurre è un'arte difficile", open letter to *Paese Sera Libri*, 1966, May 26, 144, p. 3; S. Quasimodo, "Due parole a una filologa", *Il Tempo*, 1966, July 6, p. 19, and Rosa Del Conte, "Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi", *Belfagor*, 1966, 31 luglio, 4, pp. 471-482. As several scholars entered the debate, the controversy, in the newspapers, reached greater notoriety: Adrian Popa, "Il premio Nobel non sa il romeno...", *Il Borghese*, 1966, July 7, 27, p. 494; Perpessicius, "A proposito di una traduzione da Arghezi", *Cultura Neolatina*, XXVI, 1966, 2-3, pp. 277-281; Mircea Zăciu, "Glose: Argheziene", *Tribuna*, 10, 1966, 52, p. 3; Rodica Locusteanu, "Tudor Arghezi între Quasimodo și Rosa Del Conte" ["Tudor Arghezi between Quasimodo and Rosa Del Conte"], *Secolul 20*, 1973, 5, pp. 206-211; Mircea Popescu, "Un grande poeta tradito", *Persona*, 1966, July, pp. 18-19; Carlo Ferdinando Russo, "Il beotarca laureato", *Belfagor*, 1967, March 31, pp. 347-350; L. Valmarin, "'Cultura' rumena in Italia", *Il Tempo*, 1970, August 7, p. 201. This list of articles, while not meant to be exhaustive, provides an overview of the scope of the debate on these translations. To be thorough, we also point out that the controversy between Rosa Del Conte and Quasimodo opened in April 1966, when the Nobel Prize winner (April 29, in *Paese Sera*) replied to a note from Mr. Gianni Toti, in which Toti had stated that the translated poems were an adaptation of an Italian text made by Vianu.

¹⁷ Tudor Arghezi, *Poesie*. Translated by Salvatore Quasimodo, Milano, Mondadori, 1966.

¹⁸ Tudor Arghezi, *Poesie tradotte da Salvatore Quasimodo*. Edited by Marco Dotti, preface by Claudio Lolli, Viterbo, Stampa Alternativa, 2004.

Vrânceanu¹⁹, was built entirely on a “process of equivalence”²⁰ which aimed for re-poeticization, thus offering an interpreted reading of the Arghezian works. The apparent superficiality of the translations was criticised by several scholars, including Rosa Del Conte, a tenured professor teaching the Romanian Language Seminar at the Institute of Romance Philology of the University of Rome²¹.

The reaction and response to Mondadori’s Arghezian anthology was a letter entitled “Tradurre è un’arte difficile” [“Translating Is a Difficult Art”]²², published in the daily newspaper *Paese Sera* following a note by Gianni Toti. The theme around which professor Del Conte’s intervention revolves is the concept of *competence*, which is missing in the translations published by Mondadori. Additionally, she noticed (and pointed out) many “lexical and conceptual misunderstandings”²³ in the mentioned translation.

At the end of this letter, Rosa Del Conte writes: “I will account for these misunderstandings in a specialized journal, through an objective and documented critical examination of the results achieved. And not because I like to argue, but out of professional duty only”²⁴. Inevitably, the dialogue between the professor and the poet-translator quickly escalated to a public controversy, as Quasimodo replied to the piqued letter in the “Conversazioni con Quasimodo” [“Conversations with Quasimodo”] column of the newspaper *Il Tempo*. His was a brief and annoyed speech entitled “Due parole a una filologa” [“Two Words to a Philologist”]²⁵.

Examining del Conte’s dispute with Quasimodo, what emerges is a dichotomy between her translator and professor perspective, and that of the translator-poet. With the study “Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi” announced and somewhat anticipated in “Tradurre è un’arte difficile”, Del Conte actually seeks an answer to a recurrent and seemingly unresolved question: what should poetic translation be faithful to? It is not uncommon to hear, as Mounin quotes, that “blind grammatical fidelity kills the text” or that “a mechanical fidelity

¹⁹ Adrian Popa, “Il premio Nobel”, p. 494.

²⁰ Marco Dotti, “Per rompere il silenzio”, in Tudor Arghezi, *Poesie*, p.142.

²¹ I am referring to Mircea Popescu’s article, also cited by Marco Dotti, “Un grande poeta tradito”, *Persona*, 1966, 7, pp. 18-19. From Del Conte’s perspective, the lack of professionalism shown by Quasimodo is even worse in the light of the fact that, after being contacted by Veronica Porumbacu, the professor had offered to help the poet, from the philological point of view, in the work of translation. S. Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 12, fasc. 1, letter from Rosa Del Conte to Quasimodo, 1960, March 3: “io Le sto a disposizione con quei sussidi filologici che possono soccorrere all’approfondimento dei valori non solo logici ma sopra tutto suggestivi, racchiusi nella parola poetica del testo originale”.

²² Rosa Del Conte, “Tradurre è un’arte difficile”.

²³ *Ibidem*: “travisamenti lessicali [...] e concettuali”.

²⁴ *Ibidem*: “Di essi (Di tali travisamenti) renderemo conto, in una rivista specializzata, attraverso un esame critico obiettivo e documentato dei risultati raggiunti. E non già per amore di polemica, ma per dovere professionale”.

²⁵ Salvatore Quasimodo, “Due parole a una filologa”, p. 19.

to style would lead to similar brilliance". It would appear that a balance between faithful translation and "free" translation has not yet been achieved; therefore, there is an ongoing dispute between "the professors obsessed with external, literal fidelity to all the formal linguistic elements of the text, and the artists preoccupied with a deeper, internal fidelity"²⁶. Without having written a work about translation herself, Rosa Del Conte entered the debate on translation fidelity and beauty. Although she does not offer a solution with the case study "Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi", it is interesting to see how she positions herself in this line of theoretical discussions. Her different approach to translation is inevitably determined by a circumstantial factor. For the professors-philologists (of that time) the act of translation is intrinsically related to her didactic activity and, therefore, not merely responding to the need of making a text intelligible and appreciated from a critical and aesthetic viewpoint, as translation is subordinated to the need to explain the dynamics of the translational process²⁷.

In this intense "dialogue/exchange of ideas", Quasimodo places himself at the opposite end, accusing Rosa Del Conte of translating lyrics with "old-fashioned philological precision"²⁸ thus obtaining poor results. The accusation, further extended to the entire category of "professors", is that poetry, when translated, is replaced by an impeccable philological text which loses "the poetic quality of the original"²⁹. The constructed philological translation would therefore present itself as a "verbally faithful handbook, similar to a dictionary list"³⁰. If the translator-professor proposes translations considered to be mere transcriptions from one language to another, the poet-translator – not necessarily obtaining better results – aims for a poetic approximation by proposing a translation seen as an adaptation, an individual reading or even an equivalent substitute.

The entire controversy centred on the Arghezian translations, employed as a pretext for a discussion on theoretical approaches, is characterised by the use of sarcasm and irony. The discourse contains antiphrasis and semantic inversions and is based on the strategic employment of irony – a tool by means of which the debate is carried out.

It is therefore interesting to observe how the irony – which underlies this

²⁶ Georges Mounin, *Teoria e storia della traduzione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965, pp. 141-143.

²⁷ Rosa Del Conte's classical formation makes her approach the text in this manner, perhaps because she unconsciously considers translation to be a tool bearing a propaedeutic character. Translation is not *fine a se stessa* [an end in itself] but rather it configures a means by which the text may become usable, emphasising its linguistic functioning, its philological perspective and its subordination to criticism.

²⁸ Salvatore Quasimodo, "Traducendo Arghezi", in Tudor Arghezi, *Poesie*, p. 18: "cronometrata precisione filologica". The editor of the volume notes that this contribution, whose title is purely editorial, constitutes the text of a unique interview.

²⁹ *Ibidem*: "la qualità poetica dell'originale".

³⁰ *Ibidem*: "manuale di fedeltà verbale, molto simile a un elenco di dizionario".

discussion – conceals in a certain sense a double nature: on the one hand a more or less kindly irony, on the other an ill-concealed seriousness in expressing one's opinions. From the "exchange" between Rosa Del Conte and Salvatore Quasimodo, starting from the significant use of the phrase "the unfaithful uglies", certainly emerges the polemical charge inherent in the antiphrasis³¹.

The "Unfaithful Uglies" or the Art of Translation

The synthetic essay "Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi" shows that Rosa Del Conte, from a seemingly passive position of the reader, transforms the reading experience into a fruitful and conscious analysis endeavour. This makes her dismantle Quasimodo's translations and construct a critical essay containing, perhaps involuntarily, certain specific aspects of her own practice of translation and of the deontology required by the translator³².

As F. Donatiello noted, Rosa Del Conte criticises the "practice of poetic translation"³³ outrightly denying the opportunity of doing poetic translation in a style that differs from that of the original. The refusal of a translation model perceived as distant from the philological one stands out in the title around which the entire development of the critical discourse converges – and by which it is conditioned.

The expression "unfaithful uglies" inevitably leads to a conflict between literal translation and adaptation³⁴, and therefore to the binomial fidelity and beauty. The former represents the linguistic-semantic component while the latter stands for the aesthetic component. Rosa Del Conte does not deny the existing and necessary connection between linguistic fidelity (grammatical, lexical, expressive) and literary aesthetics (stylistic, musical). And yet, she considers the translator's poetic talent insufficient to concretely perform, during the translation process, the transition from linguistic operation to literary operation³⁵.

The "unfaithful uglies" is a sarcastic pun on the 17th century French view on

³¹ From the good-natured irony that characterises the closest personal relationships to the conflict expressed by the biting irony, many tones and nuances can be observed. Northrop Frye believes that it is precisely from combative irony that it is a natural ally of satire, so much so that it has assimilated them. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, New York, Atheneum, 1967. See also Duncan McFarlane, "The Universal Literary Solvent: Northrop Frye and the Problem of Satire, 1942 to 1957", *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 37, 2011, June, 2, pp. 153-172.

³² The antiphrasis to which we refer assumes a decisive role that illustrates the vision of reality and of translatology for Rosa Del Conte, it conveys the stylistic and lexical choices, and it establishes a particular communicative relationship with the reader (intended here mostly as an audience of specialists and colleagues) to which she addresses primarily to convey a deontological message of professional ethics.

³³ Rosa Del Conte, "Le brutte infedeli", p. 471: "pratica della traduzione poetica".

³⁴ Georges Mounin, "Teoria e storia della traduzione", p. 134.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

the expression *les belles infidèles* [the unfaithful beauties], translated and popularised in Italian as *le belle infedeli*, which commonly referred to those translations whose authors, in order to make their work as appealing as possible to the target audience, did not shy away from altering the form or even the content of the original text³⁶. It refers to an empty, purely aesthetic operation aiming to captivate the reader: a transposition closer to the welcoming culture, satisfying the public's taste and yet ignoring any principle of philological "faithfulness"³⁷. In a persistent exercise in rhetoric, Rosa Del Conte explains her own perspective; the antiphrastic view, implicit in the use of the expression "unfaithful uglies", is no longer disguised, thus intentionally underscoring the negative connotation of its criticism³⁸. Starting from the title, the stance taken by the Italian professor regarding these translations is clear and already anticipated in the article "Tradurre è un'arte difficile". The translation choices adopted by Quasimodo do alter the original text. In an attempt to obtain an aesthetically pleasing result, the translator has "debased, altered, misunderstood"³⁹ the poetic language of the artist, so much so as to make it insignificant⁴⁰.

In elaborating her own study, which was then published in the section "Noterelle e Schermaglie" in the *Belfagor* journal, Rosa Del Conte makes "echoic

³⁶ See Francesca Ervas, "Perché l'ironia riguarda il pensiero", *Esercizi Filosofici*, 2011, 6, p. 64.

³⁷ Bruno Osimo, *Manuale del traduttore: guida con glossario*, Milano, Hoepli, 2004, p. 188.

³⁸ Tommaso Russo Cardona, *Le peripezie dell'ironia. Sull'arte del rovesciamento discorsivo*, Sesto San Giovanni, Meltemi Editore, 2009, p. 144. This subtle and ironic play on words can be understood by an attentive reader. T. Russo Cardona writes: "La comprensione dell'ironia si fonda d'altronde sulla capacità di mobilitare conoscenze e correlare enunciati e assunzioni di sfondo, capacità essenziale anche per la negoziazione linguistica di un conflitto. Tanto nell'ironia quanto nel conflitto argomentativo c'è bisogno non solo di sapere che certe affermazioni presuppongono un certo sfondo di assunzioni, ma anche di controllare sino a che punto l'altro condivide questa nostra conoscenza" (p. 144).

³⁹ Rosa Del Conte, "Le brutte infedeli", p. 471: "avvilito, alterato, frainteso il linguaggio poetico dell'artista, fino all'insulsa lepidezza di un linguaggio poetico".

⁴⁰ From the *Standard Pragmatic Model* theorized by Grice (Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation", *Syntax and Semantics*, 1975, 3, pp. 41-58) the interest in irony focused on the "contrast" inherent in the use of this rhetorical tool. The dissertation of the problem, whose conversational implications have been analysed, has favoured the birth of a theoretical line that includes a series of approaches defined as "two-stage", interested on the ironic phrase, on inference, typically opposite to the literal meaning, just as in the case of "unfaithful uglies". As Valerio Cori considers, only in a second time, the context takes on a more important role in determining the meaning of the ironic expression. Thanks to these approaches, defined as "one-stage", direct access to both meanings, literal and ironic, is therefore simplified. For a more in-depth analysis of the concept of irony, see the PhD thesis on verbal irony: Valerio Cori, *In che senso l'ironia dice il contrario? I vincoli cognitivi dell'ironia verbale*. Tesi di dottorato coordinata dal prof. Michele Corsi e dalle relatrici prof.sse Ivana Bianchi e Carla Canestrari, Università degli Studi di Macerata, Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, dei beni culturali e del turismo, Corso di dottorato di ricerca in Human Sciences, Ciclo XXIX, anno 2014-2016, p. II. With the development of the theories examined by Valerio Cori, the theme of contrast has gained more relevance, emphasising the social and pragmatic functions that verbal irony covers.

use” of the language: fully aware of the intellectual context in which both she and the public she addresses reside (the *common ground* they share), she uses the expression *belle infedeli/brutte infedeli* in a hermeneutic way⁴¹. In this sense, the phrase used by Rosa Del Conte, in which the author’s voice becomes the protagonist, can be read as an example of verbal irony⁴². Or, rather, considering the sarcasm inherent in the use of this phrase and in its explanation, it could be an example of sarcastic irony.

In this particular context, namely that of sarcastic irony, I must readdress the definition proposed by Valerio Cori: a form of negative irony imperatively meant to convey biting criticism. The object of irony is generally criticised in public⁴³.

How Poetry Is Translated: For a “Discontinuous” Theory of Translation

In what follows, I intend to point out the fundamental principles that guided Rosa Del Conte’s practice of translation, with particular emphasis on their application in the context of her Eminescian interpretative and translative laboratory (from *Eminescu o dell’Assoluto* to *Poesie*). In this sense, the most illuminating are the three non-programmatic texts, “Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi” (1966), *Pro-Memoria [Memorandum]*⁴⁴ (1967)

⁴¹ In his doctoral thesis, Valerio Cori explains that “essendo ironia e umorismo forme di comunicazione indiretta, l’interpretazione diversa da quella letterale può essere indotta da alcuni elementi (cues) e può servirsi di alcuni indizi (clues) che portano alla comprensione del significato indiretto. Secondo il modello pragmatico di Hirsch (2011), gli elementi che possono indurre ad interpretare una determinata espressione come ironica sono: la violazione palese di una delle massime del principio di cooperazione di Grice (1975), la presenza di una menzione ecoica (Sperber & Wilson, 1981), l’uso insincero di atti linguistici assertivi, commissivi, espressivi e direttivi (Haverkate, 1990), la presenza di una finzione (Clark & Gerrig, 1984)”. See Galia Hirsch, “Between Irony and Humor: A Pragmatic Model”, *Pragmatics & Cognition*, 19, 2011, 3, pp. 530-561, Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, *Syntax and Semantics*, 1975, 3, pp. 41-58, Deirdre Wilson, Sperber Dan, “On Verbal Irony”, *Lingua*, 1992, 87, pp. 53–76, Herbert H. Clark, Richard Gerrig, “On the Pretense Theory of Irony”, *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, 1984, 113, pp. 121-126.

⁴² Verbal irony, also defined as linguistic irony, must not lead to the error of thinking that the ironic nature of an expression is to be found only in the words used. Any phrase can be used in an ironic way, based on the relationship with its referent. Significantly, already in 1990, Haverkate underlined two of the verbal irony characteristics: the intentionality and the fact that the interpretation of verbal irony is based on the knowledge shared by the sender and receiver about the commented situation. See Henk Haverkate, “A speech act analysis of irony”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14, 1990, 1, pp. 77-109, and Valerio Cori, *In che senso l’ironia dice il contrario? I vincoli cognitivi dell’ironia verbale*, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/80203748.pdf>, p. 18. Accessed July 21, 2021.

⁴³ Valerio Cori, *In che senso l’ironia dice il contrario?*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Rosa Del Conte, *Pro-memoria*, Roma, La Pergamena, 1967 http://opac.unicatt.it/search*ita/Y?SEARCH=rosa+del+conte+curriculum&SORT=D&searchscope=13 (code: Fondo Del Conte op-53). Accessed July 31, 2021.

and the "Premessa" ["Foreword"] to the volume *Poesie*⁴⁵ (1989).

These three texts – read like a "discontinuous" theory of translation – are structurally distant and were written for thoroughly different purposes. Rosa Del Conte's statements on translation do not form an explicit, coherent system, but are occasional externalizations caused by specific moments, as in the case of the controversy with Quasimodo, where I find perhaps their most extensive and complex formulation. If the controversy with Quasimodo constitutes – in short – a "construction", a tool meant to discredit the prototype of the poet-translator by using a specific example (the volume published by Mondadori), pointing out his shortcomings (the fact that the translator did not know Romanian, the Arghezi poetic and Romanian culture in general...), the "Promemoria" and the "Foreword" to the volume *Poesie* are, instead, completely different texts, aimed at highlighting the skills of a completely dedicated professor, a specialist and appraiser of the subject.

I must also underline that such typologically distinct texts were also drawn up at different and distant times. The discontinuity is not only in terms of structure and content, but also with respect to the timeline of the elaboration of a discourse on translation which is intrinsically fragmentary.

The first one, "Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi" – as discussed above – is a harsh, sometimes ironic, point-by-point criticism of someone else's translations, while the second one, the "Memorandum", represents a crowning of the curriculum vitae compiled by Del Conte in 1967, telling "the story of a vocation and a passion"⁴⁶, as stated in the first paragraph. In short, this text briefly narrates the way in which Rosa Del Conte acquired and cultivated her skills. Probity and rectitude are the rightful basis of a career which – in her view – makes her more suitable for translating the Romanian poet's work. The key word in approaching this text is therefore competence, understood as the full ability to navigate a specific field. This, for Rosa Del Conte, can only be the result of study and dedication. In this text, written by R. Del Conte in response to academic requests and initially conceived as material to use on the occasion of institutional competitions, there are recurring expressions such as: *preparazione* [knowledge], *impegno* [diligence], *rigore* [accuracy], *lavoro solitario* [solitary work]⁴⁷. In this specific context, she writes about her commitment to a manner of translation featuring arduous adherence to the word and its melodic drafting: "The strong passion for a field of study [...] made me particularly sensitive to the seduction of the poetic word, engaging me not only in critical interpretations, but in an attentive

⁴⁵ More than thirty years after the exegetical volume dedicated to Eminescu's work, Del Conte published a volume of translations of his poetry, which constitutes the culmination of a decade-long philological work of *labor limae*: Mihai Eminescu, *Poesie*.

⁴⁶ Rosa Del Conte, *Pro-Memoria*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

and – I hope – increasingly subtler translation effort”⁴⁸.

The “Premessa”, chronologically distant from the other two, is the introduction to her volume of Eminescian translations, on which she worked for more than thirty years⁴⁹. The anthology of Eminescian texts was ideally conceived as a complement to the monograph volume, and compiled starting from the early 1960s, when R. Del Conte thought of publishing the study on Eminescu in two volumes⁵⁰. In a supplementary worksheet on the editorial project, preserved in the Rosa Del Conte Archive, she wrote: “I took on the ambitious commitment of offering the world of Italian culture, which used to know (and it is unfortunately still true) only a small part of the lyrics published by Eminescu during his lifetime, a larger picture of this high form of poetry”⁵¹. Faithful to that commitment, Rosa Del Conte translates approximately 5000 verses, 74 pieces that fill 140 *cartelle* destined to become 160 with the planned introduction. The initial project – seen by several publishers, including Lerici Editore⁵² and Junimea⁵³ – takes shape on the occasion of Eminescu’s Centenary, due to the intervention of A. Răuța and the Fundación Cultural Rumana (Madrid)⁵⁴.

The “Premessa” (Rome, April 30, 1989) finally published in the volume proves to be much more concise than Del Conte’s original plans⁵⁵. However, in a few pages, the professor manages to condense her own ideas on translation both in terms of the working methodology adopted and in terms of her own anthological choices. Aware of the richness of connotations of the poetic word, Rosa Del Conte offers the readers an overview on the principles guiding her on a technical level: “I paid special attention to the melodic rhythm, following the musical cadence, which a translation in verse cannot discard, committing myself to reproducing, not to

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7. “La forte passione per un campo di studi [...] mi rendeva particolarmente sensibile alla seduzione della parola poetica, impegnandomi non solo in interpretazioni critiche, ma in un attento e spero sempre più scaltrito sforzo di traduzione”.

⁴⁹ The existence of different versions of Del Conte’s Eminescian translations allows us not only to reconstruct the phylogeny of his translative work, but also to observe how and to what extent different translative choices are determined by the different purposes of the translation. While in *Eminescu o dell’Assoluto* her translations were subordinate to the critical discourse and to an obvious pedagogical function (see Rosa Del Conte, “Le brutte infedeli”, p. 482), in *Poesie* the translation becomes in itself the protagonist.

⁵⁰ Letters: Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 28p, fasc. 3, Mucchi Editore, 3/2/1962; Busta 21, fasc. 3, Mucchi Editore, 24/1/1962, 5/2/1962.

⁵¹ Archive 3, Eminescu material not systematized: “ho assunto l’ambizioso impegno di offrire al mondo della cultura italiana, che di Eminescu conosceva e purtroppo ancora conosce soltanto una parte delle liriche edite in vita, un quadro più vasto di quest’alta poesia”

⁵² The reference is to “Promemoria”, p. 7 and Archivio 2 Del Conte, Busta 18, fasc. 1.

⁵³ Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 20, fasc. 1, Irimia, 17/12/1988.

⁵⁴ Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 15, fasc. 4, Răuța and Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 24p, fasc. 1, Răuța.

⁵⁵ Archivio 1 Del Conte, Busta 15, fasc. 4, Răuța, 10/1/1989.

transposing, the metric structures of the original"⁵⁶. After having reassured the reader about the philological adherence to the original and the preservation of the melodic line, the professor also dwells on the reasons behind the selection of the texts, yet another example of balance as part of the translation enterprise: "it seemed appropriate to me that it [Eminescu's poetry] should be represented, albeit by 'samples', in the variety of its themes and according to the canons of aesthetic evaluation consecrated by the Romanian critical tradition"⁵⁷. Here, Rosa Del Conte also expresses her awareness that one's reading experience should be accompanied by a more articulated discourse. However, the *Premessa* seems rather significant in its content and quite coherent with the previous texts, which is a sign of a linear and conscious path of study and work.

An analysis on these three texts from a multifunctional perspective developed on several reading levels would let me extrapolate the essential standard of the professor's entire activity: a correct understanding of the text on a philological level, a re-construction of the creative, cultural and semantic context, and an identification of the interpretative plan while still following the structure.

In the first text, for instance, we find one of Del Conte's most elaborate formulation of her view on the role of the translator and of the multiple dimensions of the labour he/she is called to perform:

We thus maintain that a translator, before being a poet, must be satisfied, in the first phase of elaborating his work, with being – humbly – an interpreter: yet he must be so in the most thorough fashion, so as not to leave the word the slightest margin of uncertainty or of imperfection. He must know the precise and full value of each word, although not simply as it is outlined by the still indispensable lexicographical inquiries, but as it is deduced from that specific logical and emotional context, influenced not only by the syntactic structures of a language or its particular metaphorical usage, but also by the highly personal way in which a true poet takes on the various aspects of the language, arranging and moulding them under the impulse of his particular sentiment and under the mark of his culture. It is not insignificant that translating a poet should mean knowing not only the language in which he writes, but also the history of his human experiences and of his cultural encounters within the broader context of the civilization to which he belongs⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Rosa Del Conte, "Premessa", p. VII: "mi sono preoccupata del ritmo melodico, nel rispetto di quella cadenza musicale, a cui non può rinunciare una traduzione in versi, impegnandomi a riprodurre, non a trasporre, le strutture metriche dell'originale".

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. IX: "mi è parso opportuno che essa [la poesia di Eminescu] venisse rappresentata, sia pure per 'campioni', nella varietà dei suoi temi e secondo canoni di valutazione estetica consacrati dalla tradizione critica rumena".

⁵⁸ Rosa Del Conte, "Le brutte infedeli", p. 472: "Sosteniamo cioè che un traduttore, prima di essere un poeta, deve accontentarsi, nella prima fase di elaborazione del suo lavoro, di essere – modestamente – un interprete: ma lo deve essere in modo totale, senza lasciare alla parola il minimo margine di incertezza o di sbavatura. Egli deve conoscere l'esatto e totale valore del vocabolo – non quale si rileva dai pur indispensabili riscontri lessicografici – ma quale si deduce da quel determinato

According to Del Conte, the true accomplished translator must be, above all, an *interpreter* whose area of interest she broadens and deepens such as to ultimately encompass the whole intellectual and emotional world of the author and his place within his culture of origin.

Interpreting the Absolute: Translation in Rosa Del Conte's Eminescian Laboratory

With the “unfaithful uglies”, Rosa Del Conte actually highlights a contrast that by characteristics falls within what H. L. Colston and J. O'Brien define *contrast of type*⁵⁹. It is a type of contrast from which emerges different polarities: beautiful-ugly, good-bad, right-wrong. Far from being a compliment to a qualitatively beautiful translation, the expression “le brutte infedeli” is in fact an ironic comment which, by detecting a defect, brings out a contrast of polarity. However, Rosa Del Conte does not limit herself to underlining this aspect, but with this phrase she actually hyperbolizes what for her is a lack of professionalism and competence.

So, the best way to analyse Rosa Del Conte's practice and “theory” is, without any doubt, her Eminescian laboratory. From the latter emerged two of the professor's most known works: on the exegetical side, the highly praised monograph *Eminescu o dell'Assoluto*, which contains hundreds of translated verses; on the translative side, the substantial anthology of Eminescian poetry *Poesie*.

The different versions of the Eminescian translations are kept in Archive 2, in the boxes marked “Traduzioni Poetiche 1 Eminescu”, “Traduzioni Poetiche 2 Eminescu” and in the file marked “?” (subsequently identified by professor I. Bican) in the box marked “Traduzioni Poetiche 5 Altri”. In several envelopes currently found in Archive 3 there are also manuscript materials that have not yet been systematised (reading notes). Manuscripts and auxiliary materials are also preserved here: notes on the pieces, handwritten translation drafts, typewritten translations that have been manually corrected and annotated. The stratification of the rewritings highlights changes of mind and reassessments of her approach to form and content, also allowing the proposal of a first synthesis of the method used in the drafting, re-elaboration and completion of translations. Thus, the translation is presented *in fieri*, as an “evolving organism”⁶⁰. Consulting this material allowed

contesto logico ed emotivo, che non è condizionato solo dalle strutture sintattiche di una lingua o dalla sua particolare vis metaforica, ma dal modo tutto personale con cui un vero poeta assume i vari aspetti della lingua, atteggiandoli e plasmandoli sotto l'impulso del suo particolare sentimento e sotto l'impronta della sua cultura. Non per nulla tradurre un poeta dovrebbe significare conoscere non soltanto la lingua in cui egli scrive, ma la storia delle sue umane esperienze e dei suoi incontri culturali, nell'ambito più vasto della civiltà cui egli appartiene”.

⁵⁹ Herbert L. Colston, Jennifer O'Brien, “Contrast of Kind versus Contrast of Magnitude”, *The Pragmatic Accomplishments of Irony and Hyperbole*, 30, 2000, 2, pp. 179-199.

⁶⁰ Paola Italia, Giulia Raboni, *Che cos'è la filologia d'autore*, Carocci, Roma, 2016, p. 11.

me to formulate a hypothesis on a reconstruction of the translation process, from the initial approach to Eminescu's creative universe to the translated texts in their final form: the one published in the volume *Poesie*.

The translations published in 1989 must be placed in connection, on the one hand, with the intermediary versions and the alternative drafts preserved in the archive (dated, in most cases, to 1965, 1979), as well as, on the other hand, with the versions cited and translated in *Eminescu o dell'Assoluto* (1962), which, from a philological-genetic standpoint, may be regarded as the "preparatory material" for the decades-long gestation ultimately leading to the translations published in *Poesie*.

In the first volume, *Eminescu o dell'Assoluto*, translation plays the role of a necessity, determined by the limited knowledge of the Romanian language in Italy and, as such, by the need for the texts quoted in the monograph to be understood by students, philologists and critics to whom the essay *Eminescu o dell'Assoluto* was addressed. In the monograph, the translation also plays an essential role in depicting the critical elements and supporting the ideas expressed by the exegete. However, the second text, *Poesie*, occupies a diametrically opposite position: here translation is no longer a mere tool of understanding, nor is it a vassal of criticism. On the contrary, it actually becomes the protagonist. Therefore, there are two divergent and complementary dimensions which nevertheless allow the attentive contemporary reader to dynamically observe a translation process that lasted almost four decades, or perhaps even longer if we were to consider the unpublished "versions" preserved in Archive 2, in the file dated 2001.

Therefore, the translations made by Rosa Del Conte reveal themselves as an interesting layering of versions allowing, at least in the field of translation, the value and function of Contini's *scartafacci*. As such, the analysis of the different versions may lead to the elucidation not only of Rosa Del Conte's working methodology, i.e. the manner(s) in which she approached Eminescu's poems in order to translate them, but also – and especially – of the way(s) in which she applied her ideas about translation to her own practice as a translator. To test this working hypothesis, and as an example of such a method applied to the study of Rosa Del Conte's translative process, I will analyse the translative trajectory of her rendition of Eminescu's *Despărțire* [*Parting*]⁶¹.

Among the materials preserved in the Archive, a series of notebooks stand out. Each notebook preserved in Archive 2 is dedicated to a single poem and contains annotations regarding the poem, analysed on a metric and stylistic level, as well as regarding its content, along with several bibliographical notes and transcribed

⁶¹ This poem did not become part of the monographic volume at the time of its publication, as Del Conte had initially planned. However, we choose to use it as a case study, as we have a first draft of the translation certainly dated May 24, 1960, by the same author.

versions⁶².

In the notebook dedicated to the poem *Despărțire*, Rosa Del Conte briefly notes some information on the genesis, publication, and content of the poem. She pays attention to details, as she notes that *Despărțire* is the last piece in a larger group of poems and that it actually closes the series of “love messages” sent from Bucharest, on which the author worked for over a year and a half. According to Perpessicius, quoted by R. Del Conte “Perp. II 146”, this series would culminate in the publication of the lyric *O, mamă* [*Oh, mother*], written at the beginning of 1880⁶³.

In the analysis of this poem, Rosa Del Conte pays particular attention to creation and publication details: she reports that *Despărțire* was published in the October issue of *Convorbiri Literare* [*Literary Conversations*], and she is aware of the numerous changes undergone by the poem in previous years. Starting from the analysis of Perpessicius, she analyses the poem as an autobiographical document, its arduous elaboration reflecting the situational, emotional, and psychological changes in the poet’s life. In her notes, Rosa Del Conte refers to 1880 as the year of caesura in Eminescu’s biography and production. The professor defines 1880 as the great breakthrough year. To support this thesis, she once again quotes Perpessicius. She particularly refers to page 391 of volume 1 of the works in which the Romanian critic reproduced the letter that Veronica wrote to Eminescu, when she returned the letters and poems to the poet, including *Dorință* [*Desire*]⁶⁴. Rosa Del Conte points out that the corrections inserted by Eminescu in 1880 onto the manuscript of 1876 are highly interesting from a psychological point of view. Perpessicius notes that the verse *și în brațele-mi întinse. Să alergi* became *și cu brațele întinse să alergi*. The change is significant, since in 1876 Eminescu was waiting for V. Micle with open arms, while four years later she was waiting impatiently for him. In giving us this example, however, Perpessicius also warns the critic-reader against making excessive use of psychological interpretation, since beyond the biographical experiences, in Eminescu’s case the poet’s greatest concern is always of an aesthetic nature, one of permanent striving for perfection.

Starting from these premises, Rosa Del Conte decides to consult the 13 written

⁶² See Archivio 2 Del Conte, Traduzioni Poetiche 1 Eminescu, Quaderni.

⁶³ She wrote: “Ultima del gruppo di poesie stampate nel nr. di ottobre del 1879 di *Conv. Lit.* Conversazioni Letterarie chiude la serie dei messaggi d’amore inviati da Bucarest; la loro stampa durava da più di un anno e mezzo e doveva culminare nella lirica *O mamma* scritta all’inizio dell’anno successivo. Testuale Perp. II 146”, in Archivio 2, Traduzioni Poetiche 1, Quaderni, *Despărțire*.

⁶⁴ The volumes used by Rosa Del Conte are: Mihai Eminescu, *Opere*, I. *Poezii tipărite în timpul vieții* [*Works*, I. *Poems Published during His Lifetime*]. Edited by Perpessicius, București, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1939; Mihai Eminescu, *Opere*, II. *Poezii tipărite în timpul vieții: note și variante. De la Povestea codrului la Luceafărul* [*Works*, II. *Poems Published during His Lifetime: Notes and Variants. From The Tale of the Forest to Evening Star*]. Edited by Perpessicius, București, Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1943.

versions of the piece *Despărțire* elaborated by Eminescu between 1877 and 1879. In this case, again, she follows Perpessicius who, referring precisely to the troubled genesis of this poem, stated – we paraphrase – that it was only with this amount of effort that the poet was able to rise to the elegiac purity of the final version. Bogdan-Duică had previously addressed this topic in the article “Mihai și Veronica” published in *Buletinul M.E.*, III, 8, 1932.

Rosa Del Conte's first considerations are about the content of version A (2254, 108-109, y. 1877)⁶⁵. The professor analyses the themes treated in the various stanzas: the urging to forget the past, the awareness of the permanence of one's state of solitude, the funeral ritual. In the same year, 1877, Eminescu also wrote the versions B, 2254 and C 2283, which Del Conte examines in parallel. In particular, Rosa Del Conte focuses on line 45, which contains a recurring image in Eminescu, and on the interpretation of the term “pustiu” already used in the poem *Mortua est*:

B

O de aș pute' ca să mă mântui
De mine însumi ca să scap
De acel pustiu al vieții mele
De acel pustiu ce l-am în cap

C

O de-aș pute ca să mă mântui
Pe mine însumi să mă scap
De acel pustiu, ce-mi arde'n suflet
Și care-mi vâjje prin cap

The annotations of lines to detect similarities and differences alternate with roughly translated lines. In this case, Del Conte's attention is directed to understanding the meaning of the text, the function of the words used, in short, she is interested in the semantic levels of the text. For example, she writes down these lines that she will later use in the translation of the final version of the poem *Despărțire*:

B

Possa venire in mente ai preti di soffiar sul morto viso il tuo nome!
E poi faccian di me quel che vogliono: scagliato a un crocicchio,
lasciato in preda ai cani dilaniino loro il cuore (variante C) che lui stesso ha dilaniato
fino ad ora!

In addition to the rendering of a miserable and dramatic reality and an unhappy

⁶⁵ Rosa Del Conte also underlines the metric structure of this version (A) with alternating novenary and octonary lines and tetrastic lines ab ab. Regarding variant D (2308, 60-61), dated to approximately 1877–1878, she shows particular attention to the title *Cântecul unui mort* [A Dead Man's Song] instead, and underlines how this represents a fusion between the texts *Despărțire* and *De câte ori iubito* [Each Time, My Love]. Of this version there is a single line in the notebook, line 10, underlining the common dream, the sacred dream.

love, Del Conte's attention seems to focus on the sequences in which the theme of loneliness and mourning is a recurring one.

In observing the development of the text, Rosa Del Conte's intention is to highlight its evolution, as well as the relationships between the different versions. Therefore, for example, she focuses on highlighting the relationship between versions E 2261, 57-59 (1878), F 2259, 357-358 (1879), G, 2261, 64-65 (1879) and H 2279 (early 1879). In fact, after having noted the peculiar elements of each of these versions, she writes: "H 2279 is related to both E and F. (G1 and G2 being metric variations of F)". In the same way, she underlines the differences that occurred, for instance, in the case of version J 2260, 233-234 referring to which she notes: "The atmosphere of the church with the songs invoking rest has disappeared. Instead, there is a line that recalls the prayer of the dead"⁶⁶.

Rosa Del Conte reads the versions and transcribes them following a *chronological* criterion. However, she also goes so far as to observe their positions in the range of the Eminescian manuscripts. For example, with reference to text I 2277, 41 (1879), she notes that it is placed next to the poems *Ode în metru antic* (sketch) [*Ode in Ancient Meter*], *Freamăt de codru* [*Trembling in the Woods*], *Dalila* and a fragment of *Scrisoarea III* [*Third Letter*]. Likewise, she notes the position of the K and J versions, providing a clear image of the page by its description: "The last two known versions, K and L, are very close, perhaps from the same day. They sit next to the ugly letter of condolence that Eminescu will send to Veronica upon the death of her husband on August 6, 1789"⁶⁷. K 2279, 84-86 and L 2279, 93-94 were drawn up after August 10, 1879. Rosa Del Conte decides to copy – in parallel – these two versions, since together they represent the last draft preceding the definitive one which is of a new delicate K + L remelting.

Starting from the notebook sketches, I can first identify the importance of the evolutionary development of the text for Rosa Del Conte, as well as the importance of its reading. In fact, Rosa Del Conte argues that the text analysis and its translation must necessarily proceed from the text and done only in close relation with the latter⁶⁸. Finally, from these first pages, what emerges is the way in which Del Conte dwells on the word and then seeks a correct contextualization in the line, in the text, in the poetics of the author. Let us observe, for example, with reference to draft G, how she dwells on verses 19-20

⁶⁶ At the end of the notebook an entire page is dedicated to researching these connections. Del Conte underlines how the idea of the stranger already present in version A has been maintained, the image of the coffin of version B (*sicriu*) and versions B and C (*racla*), or the formula *mă'ntunec* in D and E, while the poet ultimately rejected images linked to the semantic sphere of earth and dust. She also eliminates the evocative *pusti* that characterized verses 45-49 of versions B and C.

⁶⁷ Archivio 2, Quaderni: "Le ultime due versioni conosciute, K e L sono vicinissime, forse dello stesso giorno. Esse s'incontrano con la brutta della lettera di condoglianze che Eminescu manderà a Veronica per la morte del marito 6 agosto 1789".

⁶⁸ Rosa Del Conte, "Premessa", p. VIII.

De i-ar veni la preot ca de aiuri un gând
Să sufle lin de-asupra mea iubitu-ți nume sfânt

and – particularly – on *lin*, about which she writes: “observe that lin. Slowly, slow down: it is the aspiration of this distraught soul”⁶⁹. In short, Rosa Del Conte first offers a conscious, contextualized translation and only then an interpretation.

Del Conte’s notes, albeit discontinuous, disorganized and often untidy, are extremely important both with respect to the understanding of the approach to the Eminescian texts and to the reading that Del Conte performs on the texts⁷⁰. As shown by the sharp attention she gives to the minutiae of the textual and intellectual genesis of the poem, of its formal aspects and of its psychological and emotional content, the act of translation for Rosa Del Conte has to do with the deepest acquaintance with the text and the complete mastery of all its facets. Consequently, translation itself is carried on simultaneously with an in-depth critical study of the text.

It is therefore interesting to notice how Rosa Del Conte views the relationship between the notebooks and the translations. Let’s consider some lines published in the anthology *Poesie* (selection: vv. 30-38, *Despărțire*). From the lines noted in the notebook, Rosa Del Conte elaborates her own translation:

K

Tot îmi va fi mai bine ca’n ceasul de acum
Din zare depărtată să vie un stol de corbi
Rotind încet de asupra-mi să mi scoată ochii orbi
In erghelii sălbateci de cai gonind ca vântul
Să treacă pe deasupra-mi întunecând pământul
Tărâma m’or întoarce în sânu-astei țărâni
Dând pulberea-mi la vânturi și inima-mi la cârni
Iar tu rămâi în floare ca luna lui April
Cu ochii tăi cei umezi cu sîmbet de copil
Și tânără și dulce cum ești rămâi mereu,
Ci nu mai ști de mine, că nu m’oiu ști nici eu

L

Tot ămi va fi mai bine...
Din zare depărtată **răsară** un stol de corbi
Să’ntunece tot cerul pe ochii mei orbi
Răsar’o vijelie din margini de pământ
Dând pulberea-mi țărâni și inima-mi în vânt

⁶⁹ Archivio 2, Quaderni: “osserva quel lin. Piano, far piano: è l’aspirazione di quest’anima sconvolta”.

⁷⁰ In 1960, while preparing the volume *Eminescu o dell’Assoluto*, Rosa Del Conte approaches the poem *Despărțire*. She does not have a personal copy of the Perpessicus Edition. It is in fact during the summers spent in the Alessandrina Library and during the time stolen from teaching that she succeeds in transcribing in full the texts that she consults, and which she then analyzes and translates.

Finisce così a 34 versi.

Final draft

Tot îmi va fi mai bine ca'n ceasul de acum.
Din zare depărtată răsar' un stol de corbi,
Să'ntunece tot cerul pe ochii mei orbi,
Răsar'o vijelie din margini de pământ,
Dând pulberea-mi țărâni și inima-mi **la** vânt...

Ci tu rămâi în floare ca luna lui April,
Cu ochii mari și umezi cu zâmbet de copil,
Din câte ești de copilă să'ntinerești mereu,
Și nu mai ști de mine, că nu m'oiu ști nici eu.

Rosa Del Conte works at length on the translation and filing of these two stanzas (vv. 30-38) which she initially translates:

First draft (box Traduzioni Poetiche 2)

tutto sarà assai meglio che non quest'ora amara.
Dal lontano orizzonte s'alzi uno stuol di corvi
ad oscurare il cielo sopra i miei ciechi occhi;
dagli estremi confini irrompendo una raffica
la terra dia alla terra, ed al vento il cuore.

E tu, restami in boccio come il fiorito Aprile
con i grandi occhi in pianto e il sorriso infantile,
~~e ognor più, de' verdi anni, novella sia la fronda~~
e del virgulto tenero più verde sia la fronda!
Ma a te, io sarò ignoto... m'ignorerò io stesso

Printed version

Sarà sempre assai meglio che non quest'ora amara.
Dal lontano orizzonte s'alzi uno stuol di corvi
ad oscurare il cielo sopra i miei ciechi occhi;
dagli estremi confini irrompendo, una raffica
al vento dia il mio cuore, e la terra alla terra.

E tu, restami in boccio come il fiorito Aprile,
con I grandi occhi umidi e il sorriso infantile,
e il tuo virgulto tenero sempre più rinverdisca.
Ma io... per te un ignoto, e ignoto anche a me stesso.

This first draft represents the first typewritten copy of the manuscript translation made by her⁷¹. These sheets still contain footnotes – a sign of her

⁷¹ Her translations themselves highlight the fact that, for Rosa Del Conte, translating implies a continually refined *labor limae*. In the case of *Despărțire*, the archive (box “Traduzioni Poetiche 2”) contains the Romanian text on which she worked. On the page, at the top, Del Conte notes, as usual,

thorough nature. The footnotes depict other possible versions of lines 35 ("al vento dia il mio cuore, e la terra alla terra"), 37 ("e ~~dei~~ vieppiù de' verd'anni – novella sia la fronda!"), 38 ("Di me, (più) non saprai... non mi saprò io stesso"). A substantial series of annotations and changes in pencil are added to the footnotes and the text, both in terms of punctuation and of the solutions adopted in the text. Line 35 was initially translated as "la terra dia alla terra, ed al vento il mio cuore" turns into "tu dia il mio cuore, e la pena alla terra"⁷². Before that, in the notebook, Rosa Del Conte begins to work on the contrast between the image of crows and the radiant freshness of April, seeking, in the study of versions, a cadence and a rhythm capable of restoring the evocative power of the original. The professor is not interested in tracing the metrics of the original; hers is a search for meaning. Although she notices different rhythms and stanzas, she wants to convey the desolate sadness of this verse.

Returning to the example of lines 30-38, the drafts in the archive show the way in which the work phases on the translation are clearly outlined. In fact, the notebooks clearly show that there is a first moment of study of the original text, after which the professor sketches a translation in pen which is immediately typewritten. The first version of the typewritten translation is always accompanied by footnotes containing possible translations of entire lines. Subsequently, Del Conte proceeds with corrections in pencil and, where necessary, with further indications in pen. The first corrections, as we can already see in the example aforementioned, are replacement proposals which completely modify the structure and lexical choices in the lines, often the reflection of linguistic or content doubts that led to significant changes. Pencil corrections, however, are mainly lexical substitutions. A typical example is that of line 36. Eminescu associates the adjective *umezi* with the noun eyes. Initially, Del Conte translates it as *in pianto* [in tears]: however, later on she writes the word *lucenti* [shining] on the text, probably thinking about the appearance of those eyes, only to decide to remain closer to the

certain bibliographic data about the origins of the material and the year the poem has been written. The handwritten original of the translation has not been preserved, but we do have a typewritten copy. The first folder "Traduzioni Poetiche 1 Eminescu, EMINESCU, (cartella 11-31), [11]*" from the box "Traduzioni Poetiche 2 Eminescu" contains this version. The published version is instead in M. Eminescu, *Poesie*, pp. 43-45.

⁷² The text is filled with pencil notes – linguistic reconsiderations, semantic alternatives. Some are typewritten and written in the form of footnotes, as is the case of line 2 "solo te potrei chiedere se tu non fossi d'altri (a)" which in the note appears as "Se tu fossi ancor tu, te chiederei di darmi;". The footnotes are always a symptom of the initial processing stage of the translation. The pencil annotations substantially modify the text: "v3 non il fiore avvizzito della tua chioma," becomes "con non il fiore appassito", or "v 4 affidami all'oblio, di sol vo' pregarti" takes the form "questo sol ti prego", "v 21 Fra stranieri abbandonami, col volto alla parete" becomes "Lascia che le pupille mi si facciano di ghiaccio", or line 22 "mentre sotto le palpebre, la pupilla raggelasi" changes to "mentre sotto le palpebre, la pupilla si spegne" and further on into "reietto fra stranieri – il volto alla parete". The solutions proposed in pencil are adopted and incorporated into the text.

semantic area of wetness with *umidi* [damp]. However, the search for synonyms or equivalences also falls into the pattern of searching for a rhythm that follows that of the original text. Finally, the later versions of the translation only contain inversions and changes in the order of the constituents of the sentence, or changes in punctuation. In the case of the poem *Despărțire* [*Parting*], there are four different drafts, and I can propose a chronological realignment of these versions based on several particular aspects of Rosa Del Conte's working methodology. Compared to other translations, this is a philological case that can be easily reconstructed, with an extremely limited number of modifications and variations; however, it clearly exemplifies the methods of approaching the text and the translation methods adopted by Rosa Del Conte⁷³.

Conclusion

The present study, dedicated to the analysis of the world of ideas and concepts that lie beneath the expression “brutte infedeli”, aims at reconstructing Rosa Del Conte's translation process, as well as her vision of fidelity to poetry. “Sensitive to the seduction of the poetic word”⁷⁴, Rosa Del Conte lived this experience in the name of her commitment to both “critical interpretations” and the “effort to translate”⁷⁵. As an ironic sentence, “brutte infedeli” can thus be read not only as a value judgement on the Arghezian translations made by Quasimodo, but, above all, as a synthetic expression of her view on the translation of poetry, as well as an aphorism in which she gathered and condensed, antiphrastically, her experience as a reader and as a translator.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

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⁷³ Traduzioni Poetiche 1, cartella 4 (1965); Traduzioni Poetiche 1, Cartella 3 (1979); Traduzioni Poetiche 2 (1989).

⁷⁴ Rosa Del Conte, “Premessa”, p. VII: “Sensibile alla seduzione della parola poetica”.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

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ROSA DEL CONTE'S "ART OF TRANSLATION" BETWEEN CRITICISM AND PRACTICE

(Abstract)

In the synthetic essay "Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi", Rosa Del Conte – eminent philologist, critic and translator – openly criticised the volume of selected poems by Tudor Arghezi translated by Quasimodo (1966). In the apparently passive position of the reader, Rosa Del Conte turns the reading experience into an analysis endeavour. She takes apart the Arghezian translations and constructs a critical essay where, in the background, we can notice certain specific aspects of her manner of translation and of the deontology needed by the translator. As part of a rhetorical exercise, Rosa Del Conte explains her own perspective. The antiphrastic reasoning implicit in the use of the syntagm "belle infedeli" intentionally emphasises the negative connotation of her critique. This ironic phrase, an explicit case of antiphrasis, could then be read not only as a value judgment on the Arghezian translations made by Quasimodo, but especially as a synthetic expression of her perspective on the poetic translation. The present study, dedicated to the analysis of the world of ideas and concepts behind the expression "le brutte infedeli", aims to reconstruct Rosa Del Conte's translation process, as well as her idea of "fedeltà alla poesia".

Keywords: Rosa Del Conte, Quasimodo, poetic translation, rhetorical irony, *le brutte infedeli*.

ARTA TRADUCERII LA ROSA DEL CONTE ÎNTRE CRITICĂ ȘI PRACTICĂ

(Rezumat)

Eminent filolog, critic și traducător, Rosa Del Conte a criticat apariția volumului de traduceri argheziene realizate de Quasimodo în 1966 în eseu sintetic „Le brutte infedeli ovvero Quasimodo interprete di Arghezi”. Rosa Del Conte, în ipostaza aparent pasivă a cititorului, transformă experiența de lectură într-un traseu de analiză, ceea ce o determină să demonteze traducerile argheziene și să construiască un eseu critic în care să apară în fundal, poate, în mod involuntar, anumite aspecte specifice ale modului ei de traducere și a deontologiei necesare traducătorului. Într-un stăruitor exercițiu de retorică, Rosa Del Conte explică propria sa perspectivă. Concepția antifrastrică, implicită în utilizarea sintagmei „frumoaselor infidele”, subliniază intenționat conotația negativă a criticii sale. Sintagma ironică, antifrază explicită, „le brutte infedeli” poate atunci fi citită nu numai ca o judecată de valoare asupra traducerilor argheziene realizate de Quasimodo, dar, mai ales, ca o expresie sintetică a perspectivei ei asupra traducerii poeziei. Studiul de față, dedicat analizei lumii de idei și concepte care se află în spatele expresiei „le brutte infedeli”, își propune să reconstruiască procesul de traducere al Rosei Del Conte, dar și viziunea ei despre „fidelitatea față de poezie”.

Cuvinte-cheie: Rosa Del Conte, Quasimodo, traducere poetică, ironia retorică, *le brutte infedeli*.