



The Metastasio moment: language, music and translation

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Atti e Convegni

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Index

<i>Preface</i>	7
CHIARA SCIARRINO	
<i>Introduction</i>	9
DONATELLA ABBATE BADIN	
Poetic Rewritings: Issues of Cultural Distance and Examples of Textual Mediation in Seamus Heaney's Italian Translations	23
DEBORA BANCHERI	
When Italian Popular Music Sings about Ireland: Homage, Inspiration and Kindred Spirits	45
SIMONA MARTINI	
The Metastasio Moment: Language, Music and Translation	73
ANNE O'CONNOR	
Visions of Sicily and of Ireland in Sacheverell Sitwell's 'Entertainments of the Imagination'	91
ELISABETTA D'ERME	
W.B. Yeats and Eugenio Montale: images in common, different poetics	111
FABIO LUPPI	
Yeats's Other Countries: Italy	127
ELENA COTTA RAMUSINO	

Translating for the stage: the case of Owen McCafferty's Quietly MONICA RANDACCIO	141
<i>Poetry and Prose</i>	157
To The Mother House EILÉAN NÍ CHUILLEANÁIN	159
From <i>On the Spine of Italy</i> , translated by Chiara Sciarrino HARRY CLIFTON	161
<i>Contributors</i>	171

Preface

CHIARA SCIARRINO

This volume has a relatively long history behind it. It stems from a personal interest in a topic which is fascinating as well as relatively well-known abroad: as a teacher of Italian and a PhD student in Dublin, years ago, I inevitably felt the need to investigate the ways in which Italians and Italian culture were viewed, used in a way or another, exploited and written about by Irish writers and more generally by Irish people. In my mind a precise idea of what Ireland was met with what I experienced as a “foreigner”. Was the image of Ireland I had before living there faithful to reality or was it beforehand influenced by preconceived, prejudiced ideas about the country and its people? But also, to what extent could the same attitude be applied to the view Irish had and have of Italy? These were and are some of the main questions here addressed with an attempt to provide with accounts of multiple journeys during which Italy and Ireland have been variously represented.

The volume gathers some of the papers given at the Tenth Conference of EFACIS (European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies) on *Beyond Ireland: Boundaries, Passages, Transitions*, which took place at the University of Palermo from 3-6 June 2015. The number of contributions on the links between Ireland and Italy was so high that the publication of a single volume seemed the obvious result. Further contributions were sent in answer to a call for papers to offer more insight into aspects of the topic, which, as most Irish Studies scholars working in Italy know, has been explored before, sometimes offering new perspectives on single authors, sometimes venturing forth in various directions and offering a variety of provocative intersections which range widely in both subject and method.

Preface

An overview of such studies will be given by Donatella Abbate Badin in the introduction. The volume opens up several opportunities for reflection on single aspects of what seems to be a mutual and everlasting love relationship between the two countries: as a result of a successful conference, the first on Irish Studies to be organised in Palermo and in Sicily, this gathering of contributions invites for more initiatives of the kind in Italy and among Irish-Italian scholars.

The Metastasio Moment: Language, Music and Translation

ANNE O'CONNOR

The production, circulation and reception of translations are deeply embedded in the historical circumstances of the society that chooses to translate such texts. According to Lawrence Venuti, changing interpretations of foreign cultures lead to changes in the selection of foreign texts for translation (Venuti 2005). Two languages and cultures are brought into contact through translation and this relationship can evolve and diverge due to varying historical and cultural circumstances. This chapter studies the convergences and divergences in the relationship between Ireland and Italy from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century as seen through the prism of translations of the works of the Italian librettist Metastasio. The 'Metastasio Moment' in Ireland is charted in order to understand how Italian culture was variously embraced or rejected, as evidenced in the translation, circulation and reception of the Italian's works. In these discussions, the strong associations and links between Italian language, culture and music emerge as crucial mediating factors in the Irish-Italian interchange. As a central figure in the multilingual and intercultural world of music, Metastasio is an important case study to understand the interaction of music, language and translation and the cross-fertilisation of cultural contacts in Europe. The popularity and eventual rejection of Metastasio and the Italianate fashion demonstrate the ebbs and flows of translation choices and the historical variations in cultural interactions.

The Metastasio Vogue

Pietro Antonio Domenico Trapassi (1698 –1782), better known by his pseudonym of Metastasio, is possibly one of the most famous au-

Anne O'Connor

thors of libretti of all time. The Italian poet gained immense fame and popularity throughout his lifetime aided, no doubt, by his influential position as the resident librettist for the Emperor of Austria. His impressive output was translated into French, English, German and Spanish, amongst other languages, and was set to music across Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Performances of Metastasio's works were regular occurrences in all of the major operatic centres and his *canzonette* and *ariette* were also popular for local and drawing room performances.¹ His work was a fusion of literature and music with the lyrical language of the Italian prized by his contemporaries. Metastasio's melodramas were regularly translated during an extraordinary vogue for the Italian's work and his *Canzonetta Nice: Grazie agl'inganni tuoi* was, in the words of Fucilla, 'the song-hit' of the day (Fucilla 1952, 13). As one commentator has observed, his English and French contemporaries were full of interest and enthusiasm for the Italian and 'it is no exaggeration to say that all Europe was at his feet' (Bates 2005, 402). His fame spread east to Poland and Russia (Welsh 1964) but it also travelled west as far as Ireland in this European trend of Italian musical and cultural influence.

Metastasio's fame in Ireland peaked in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and was closely connected to his musical reputation. The interest in the Italian coincided with the upsurge of popularity in Italian opera in this period: there were some short Italian operas (*burlette / intermezzi*) staged in Dublin in the eighteenth century and as the nineteenth century progressed, many great Italian musical artists came to Ireland to perform (Allen 1998; Walsh 1993, 1973).² The Crow Street Theatre in Dublin put on Italian opera in the early nineteenth century and the popularity of Rossini, Bellini, Verdi and Donizetti led to a sustained presence and extended seasons of Italian opera in Dublin from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Angelica Catalani took part in Metastasio's *Il Didone* in Dublin in 1808 and she regularly returned to Ireland to perform in Italian

¹ Fucilla says that Metastasio's minor works were, between 1750 and 1825, the 'most profusely imitated and translated lyrics of the times, equalled only by versions from Anacreon.' (Fucilla 1952, 13)

² The sopranos Angelica Catalani, Giulia Grisi and Giuditta Pasta, and the legendary Italian violinist, Niccolò Paganini for example all came to Ireland.

works. Operatic troupes and musicians frequently travelled to Cork, Limerick and Belfast, while aspiring Irish musicians and performers such as Catherine Hayes and Michael Balfe travelled in the opposite direction to Italy for training and opportunities (Walsh 2000; Walsh 2008). In the early nineteenth century, Italian was adopted throughout Europe as the main operatic language and, with the travels of Italian musicians, singers, composers and librettists, this association became even more engrained (Mateo 2014, 329).

In this wave of enthusiasm for Italian music and performance, Metastasio's fame was raised in the Irish consciousness and the Italian librettist became a popular figure for performances and for translations. He was not the only Italian librettist to enjoy such fame in Ireland: others such as Giovanni Battista Casti (1724-1803) and Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni (1692-1768) also featured in Irish translations and publications. It is interesting that figures such as Metastasio, Casti and Frugoni, who were closely linked with music, gained widespread popularity in Ireland, rather than the more canonical figures such as Leopardi, Foscolo and Manzoni. In the Irish newspaper, *the Nation*, the birth of Frugoni and Metastasio at the end of the seventeenth century was heralded as the arrival of two men who would revive the declining fame of Italian literature in the succeeding age (7 February 1845). In another article, Casti is acclaimed as the most celebrated Italian poet of the eighteenth century next to Metastasio (19 September 1845). Although this opinion might not coincide with the canonical account of Italian literature, Metastasio and the other librettists were singled out for special attention because of their musical connections. It is therefore impossible to separate Metastasio and publications of his work from the music culture which surrounded it. As C.P. Brand has observed,

The cult of Italian opera, sung in Italian, naturally encouraged the study of the Italian language, and particularly of the compositions of Metastasio who wrote libretti which have been set to music more than a thousand times, and whose name and works were widely known throughout Europe. By the end of the [eighteenth] century he was probably the favourite Italian poet in England, his works appearing constantly in Italian and in English translation. (Brand 1957, 175)

Metastasio was translated by William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans as his fame grew in the Anglophone worlds. His librettos were influential in developing trends in theatre and musical drama. Along

Anne O'Connor

with Petrarch, he was the most popular Italian lyric poet of this period and translations of his lyrics appeared in the press, in periodicals and in collections of translations. In advertisements for new music in Ireland for example, Metastasio's works were promoted including his 'Vuoi ch'io lasci o mio tesoro' with the words by Metastasio adapted to the air 'Cherry ripe' (*Freemans Journal*, 5 June 1825). Metastasio's work existed in a multilingual world of song and word where languages and music overlapped and cross-fertilised.³ The Irish public, for example, could purchase in 1842 Metastasio's *Pellegrini al San Sepolcro* (*The Pilgrims of the Holy Sepulchre*) a religious Cantata for five solos and chorus, with accompaniment for the harp or pianoforte, composed by Nauman and adapted to Italian, English and French words, which was for sale in Irish booksellers (*Cork Examiner*, 6 September 1842). Booksellers regularly advertised original works by Metastasio for sale in Ireland, and in auctions of book collections, the Italian author was a staple.

Given the regular performance of Metastasio's melodramas in Italian, Metastasio became linked in the public mind with the Italian language and consequently he became central to how people learned Italian and interacted with the language. Irish pupils had a variety of opportunities to study Italian and to come into contact with Metastasio. Italian was taught at schools, universities and private academies and, in all of these educational settings, Metastasio was a strong influence and one of the first Italian authors which Irish students of Italian encountered. Italian books which were used to teach Italian in Irish schools included Ariosto, Alfieri and Metastasio (*Freemans Journal*, 19 March 1816; 13 January 1818; 21 June 1820) and the *Opere dell'Abate Metastasio scelte da Leonardo Nardini, ad uso degli studiosi della lingua italiana* [Works by Metastasio chosen by Leonardo Nardini for the use of students of the Italian language] was for sale in Dublin and

³ The links between multilingualism, opera and translation are discussed in Mateo (2014). She notes that 'Bilingual opera performances seem to have been particularly common in 18th-century Britain, where a large number of operas were staged with the Italian aria-English recitative formula. Many composers and librettists were commissioned to adapt Italian operas to this pattern and most of the pieces were extremely popular, as can be inferred from the number of monolingual and bilingual versions, frequently adapted from the same libretto, Metastasio's.' (337)

advertised in the local press. As Brand has noted of the English context, for many years Metastasio was the first poet read by students of Italian; as late as 1824 Macaulay complained that they read little else.⁴

Public recitations of Italian works by students and teachers during end of year performances and exhibitions almost invariably featured Metastasio (e.g. *Belfast Newsletter*, 25 December 1820; *Freemans Journal*, 25 July 1854; 28 July 1858; 30 June 1870). In Clongowes Wood College for example in 1856, during the Italian dialogue section of the end of year exhibition, 'a scene from Metastasio's "Death of Abel" was rendered very nicely by Mr. M. O'Shaughnessy and Mr. R. Mc Donnell' (*Freemans Journal*, 29 July 1856). A few years previously, 'the Italian dialogue by Masters Whitty, Carton, Shearman and Ring, from the *Artaserse* of Metastasio, was also admirably given; both were greeted by the auditory with delighted plaudits' (*Freemans Journal*, July 29 1851). At Mount St. Joseph in Clondakin, the efforts of the students in French, Italian and German were calculated to show how efficiently the tutors discharged their important duties. Along with Molière, the students performed a piece from Rossini which was 'heard with much pleasure' and 'the most attractive of the performances was a scene from Metastasio's *Giuseppe Riconosciuto*, ably translated and as ably set to music by Mr Johnson. The young gentlemen who sang in the several parts did well and their acting possessed considerable merit, and we believe that the composer is entitled to high praise for the manner in which he acquitted himself.' *Freemans Journal*, 30 June 1870. When the Intermediate Education Examination was introduced in Ireland in 1878, one of the recommended texts for Italian (along with Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*) was Metastasio's *Giuseppe Riconosciuto*. It is therefore not surprising that when many of these students came to publish translations and enter the world of letters, they turned to an Italian author who had been part of their education in that language and who was very much part of the cultural milieu of the era.

Translating Metastasio

Translations of Metastasio regularly appeared in periodicals and collected works during the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Ire-

⁴ Quoted in Brand, 175. Thomas Jefferson practised Italian by copying poems by Metastasio in his notebooks. See Fucilla (1952, 14).

Anne O'Connor

land. They were often isolated islands of Italianess in the midst of very domestic offerings. For example, the *Magazine of Ireland (Bolsters Quarterly Magazine)* volume IV, published in November 1826, contained three translations from Metastasio which are interspersed amongst county histories, Irish tales, sketches of excursions, and a legend of the South of Ireland by Croften Croker. One of the translations, 'from Metastasio' is short and simple:

Enough of grief by fate's decree,
This weary soul is doom'd to share,
But to be scorn'd, accused by thee,
Oh that, it cannot, cannot bear,
If rebel to my plighted love
One thought within my bosom dwell,
Yon sun—the righteous powers above,
This breaking heart—thy heart—can tell.

No translator is given, no original title is given and the Metastasio presence is unadorned by any annotations or explanations. The anonymity of the translator was quite common in the nineteenth century and translations in periodicals generally contained no paratextual details. The works are termed as being 'from Metastasio' but that lack of an original text means that the translation could be a close and faithful transfer from Italian into English but it could also be a liberal reworking or the original. Translations from Metastasio also featured in the *Dublin University Magazine* in the 1830s which were similarly minimalist in their presentation and their supply of information. In July 1833 a poem entitled 'The Voice of Nature' which was 'from Metastasio' was published. The translation was by John Francis Waller but the publication supplies no information on the original source. The poem itself contains many of the tropes which were familiar to Irish fans of Metastasio and which were central to the diffusion of his fame as a lyrical and romantic poet.

When modest Eve, retiring mildly, yields to night her power,
And every sound is hushed around, and closed, is every flower;
My Julia! Wilt thou leave thy cot, and come and rove with me,
And drink the freshening twilight breeze by yonder flowing sea?
'Tis not alone in smiling mead that joy and beauty dwell,
Or waving wood, majestic hill, or in the sunlit dell.

The Metastasio Moment: Language, Music and Translation

For now the softest zephyr cools the scarcely ruffled tide,
And gently o'er the sloping sands the rippling waters glide;
The wide—wide heavens, that lately glow'd with gold and crimson light,
Are now all darkly shadowed by the purple veil of night;
The evening star comes sweetly forth, the pensive mind to cheer,
The lady moon from clouded throne looks down serenely clear;
These are sweet *lessons* in the book which God to us has given,
And these are *thoughts* that lead the heart to soar from earth to heaven!

This translation demonstrates some of the salient features of Irish translations of Metastasio in this period. Firstly, the simplicity and clarity of the language are striking and the lexical range and syntactical constructions are basic. Metastasio's poetry was easily understood and therefore was deemed capable of an uncomplicated transfer into English and could appeal to those who were just dipping their toes in Italian literature. His words and verbal constructions were considered very accessible and therefore very suitable for translation. In an advertisement for *Metastasio: Giuseppe Riconosciuto with Biographical Notice* (Dublin: Gill and Son) it was stated that the simple text was 'very acceptable as a specimen of Italian, at once easy to translate and attractive by its flowing melodious style' (*Cork Examiner*, 17 October 1881). The second element to be highlighted is precisely the 'flowing melodious style' which can be seen in the above example in the metre and rhyming scheme. Due to the poet's musical links, the reception and translation of Metastasio was closely connected to the sound of the language and this was a large element of his appeal in this period. In the above translation, the translator has produced rhyming couplets throughout in this lyrical rendering of the Italian. Rhyme also facilitated memorisation which was very important for the performative aspect of Metastasio's works. The metre of the translation also adds to the musicality of the piece. In 1845, *The Nation* newspaper commented on 'the grace and facility of Metastasio' (19 September 1845) and this appears to have been a major factor in the popularity of his work and in his presence as a translated poet in this period.

There were many possibilities and options when translating musical works: original words could be translated for song or for poetry; there could be dual language versions of libretti; some translations might preserve the rhythmic sense of the original, others might prefer the sense to be the guiding feature (Gallo 2006). Metastasio's vast

Anne O'Connor

output offered a myriad of possibilities for translators who adapted the Italian and domesticated him for local needs. A previously noted, the Italian language had become associated with musicality, and this musicality was a guiding feature and an important influence for translator. In the Irish translations of Metastasio, we can observe an interest in harmony and rhythm and an attraction to the poet in musical terms which transcended religious or political divides.⁵ By analysing the textual form of Metastasio's work in translation, we are of course missing out on the multidimensional nature of these pieces and cannot discuss the melody, pitch, rhythm, tempo, harmony, articulation of these works in music (Susam-Saraeva 2008, 190). The published translations nonetheless bear the trace of their musical originals and influences, and the links were very clear in the public mind – the *Freemans Journal* said of the Italian, 'Metastasio was so sensible of the delicacy and nicety requisite in adapting poetry to music, that he spent his whole life perfecting himself in the knowledge of them' (25 December 1828). The Irish translations of Metastasio bear the hallmarks of these close musical connections.

The sound of the language was therefore central to Metastasio's fame and fortune in Ireland and was closely linked to general perceptions of the Italian language. During a lecture in Dublin on the Italian language in 1819 by a certain Sig. Agnelli, the lecturer discussed Metastasio and recited from the Italian author. A journalist in the audience agreed with Agnelli's proclamations on the harmonies of the Italian language, and commented that 'Any one at all conversant with the beautiful and flowing language of Italy, will readily allow that it is not to be at all compared with the Gaelic nasal twang or the sibilating and guttural harshness of the mingled English' (*Freemans Journal*, 15 April 1819). The Italian language was thus perceived as harmonious and melodious and translators tried to transport these features into their works, particularly when they were translating a poet so renowned for his lyricism as Metastasio. In introducing his translation of Metastasio's 'Hymn to Venus' in 1836, the Irish translator John Francis Waller said that

⁵ Metastasio, like Petrarch, was praised in the Anglophone world primarily for his qualities of technique – his 'exquisite taste' and 'the harmony and rhythm of his numbers' as well as for the 'pure flow of strict morality everywhere observable throughout his poetry.' (Brand 1957, 102)

The Metastasio Moment: Language, Music and Translation

Metastasio's beautifully graceful 'Hymn to Venus' must be so familiar to every Italian scholar, that it is unnecessary here to present it to the reader. A translation, closely following the original, both in expression and metre would be the most obvious as well as the most easy, but such as one would certainly be but little in accordance with the genius of our own poetry, and quite inadequate to preserve the simple and graceful dignity of the Italian composition. I have for these reasons, deviated, in some degree, from the strict manner of rendering the originals, to which I have in these articles, heretofore confined myself. The following translation, though somewhat paraphrastic, will not, I trust, be found altogether untrue to its prototype, either in sentiment or execution. (*Dublin University Magazine*, Feb 1836, 142)

Waller was willing to deviate from the original and ignore contemporary notions of the importance of faithfulness in order to better render Metastasio into English, while still maintaining the sentiment and 'execution' of the Italian's work.⁶ For the Irish translators of the Italian, the flow of the lyrics and the musical elements of the verse were important components which they attempted to preserve in their translations.

John Francis Waller who published under the pseudonyms 'Jonathan Freke Slingsby' and 'Tota' was one of the most prolific translators from Italian in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century and one of a wide variety of Irish people who translated Metastasio. Translations of famous Italian lyric poems became a mark of refinement in the nineteenth century (Pite 2006), a trait that can be seen in the engagement of the upper echelons of Irish society with Italian literature. For example Lord Charlemont wrote a *History of Italian Poetry from Dante to Metastasio* (sections of which were posthumously published in 1822) which contained a wide-ranging introduction to Italian poetry and translations from all eras up to the eighteenth century (Charlemont and Talbot 2000). Charlemont was a pioneer in terms of introducing a survey of Italian literature to the Anglophone public (Talbot 1999) and it is interesting that Metastasio was the final poet in his collection. Almost a contemporary of Charlemont, he was among the figures singled out for inclusion in the Italian canon and worthy

⁶ There were of course widespread debates in Europe on approaches to translation in this period and the relative merits of faithfulness in translation practices. For these debates in an Irish context, see Cronin (1996).

Anne O'Connor

of transfer into English. Members of the Anglo-Irish Protestant élite who translated Italian literature showed themselves to be very much in harmony with prevailing trends in Britain where Italy featured largely in the romantic imagination (Brand 1957; O'Connor 1998). However, translations from Metastasio were not confined to the Anglo-Irish élite as can be seen in the engagement of writers such as James Clarence Mangan with the Italian.

Mangan, who was to become one of the greatest poetic voices and translators of nineteenth-century Ireland, translated Metastasio as part of his entrance onto the literary scene. In one of his earliest publications in 1832, he published a fragment of a translation of Metastasio's *Amor Timido* (*Timid Love*) in the *Dublin Penny Journal*:

Amor Timido

Placido zeffiretto,
Se trovi il caro oggetto,
Digli che sei sospiro,
Ma non gli dir di chi.
Limpido ruscelletto,
Se mai t' incontri in lei,
Dille che pianto sei,
Ma non le dir qual ciglio
Crescer ti fe' cosi.

Timid Love

Ah! gentle zephyr, ah! if e'er
Thou find the mistress of my heart,
Tell her thou art a sigh sincere,
But never say whose sigh thou art!
Ah! limped rivulet, if e'er
Thy murmuring waters near her glide,
Say thou art swell'd by many a tear,
But not whose eyes those tears supplied.

Once again, this translation demonstrates the relative simplicity of the original and its English version, both of which are very accessible texts. Mangan expands slightly on the Italian text but attempts to maintain a rhyming scheme and the lexical proximity. He adds exclamations 'ah!' to the translation which are not present in the original, presumably for greater emotional effect. The 'dear object'

of the author's affections in the original becomes 'the mistress of my heart' in the translation, possibly to enable a rhyme with 'whose sigh thou art'. To facilitate the rhyme in English, Mangan adjusts his language to create a lyrically expressive translation which evokes the melody of the original. Mangan translated only a few works from Metastasio, and like his translations from Petrarch, he briefly engages with the author and the language, and then moves on to other literatures and time periods.

For Mangan, his translations of Metastasio would appear to be an exercise in literary practice, possibly he was introduced to the Italian by his language tutor, a Fr. Graham who had studied in Salamanca and Palermo, and he might have translated Metastasio's lines as a first foray into Italian literature. In the latter stages of his literary career Mangan expanded the horizons of translations in Ireland by translating from Oriental languages, by publishing pseudotranslations, and by using original works as suggestive starting points for his creative impulses rather than faithfully rendering texts into English. In his earlier translations, however, he was quite traditional in his choice of text and in his faithfulness to the text. This can be seen in his translations from Petrarch which seem to have been a necessary form of literary apprenticeship for him. Mangan also translated from other Italian poets but they were all very much of a traditional nature and none fits this bill more so than Metastasio. Translation of the Italian writer could even be deemed a necessary rite of passage for any aspiring young translator and Mangan's translation must be situated in this context of an early flirtation with a popular European vogue which he subsequently abandoned in favour of more fanciful and less traditional experiments in translation. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Italian poet appealed to Mangan and in later years, when Mangan published a supposed translation from the Arabic of 'Baba Khodjee' in 1840 (Mangan most likely invented the author as the original was never found), he added a note to say that Khodjee's 'simple, truthful, yet not unpoetical philosophy' recalled to him 'that of our early favorite Metastasio' (*Dublin University Magazine*, April 1840). Mangan's poetical and lyrical rendering of the verse of Metastasio, even in this short piece, demonstrates the poet's popularity for translators who wished to grapple with Italian literature and also the artistic possibilities that the Italian poet offered.

Anne O'Connor

Reaction and Change

Mangan's short translation from Metastasio provoked a rather extreme reaction which illustrates a turn against Italian poetry and a reassessment of Metastasio and the Arcadian tradition. In a swiping attack on Mangan's translation of Metastasio's poetry a writer in the *Dublin Penny Journal* said:

Such a *conchetto* may suit the air of the Borromean isles - it may be the language of affectation, simpering its syllables in languid accents, and reposing on a couch of roses, but it cannot be the language of manly love. [...] Pretty, no doubt it is; but we doubt much if it is not more the language of refined and courtly affectation, than that of nature-more adapted to the artificial atmosphere of the opera house, than to the simplicity of the common feelings of humanity-and like its glittering music, as compared with our own unrivalled melodies, infinitely inferior in the expression of natural passion and sentiment. (*Dublin Penny Journal*, 15 September 1832)

In the criticism, Metastasio's language is presented as limpid and effeminate, the language of refined and courtly affectation, an inferior artificial language when compared to the natural passion and sentiments of the local melodies. Mangan's translation of Metastasio was termed as 'pretty' and suited to the artificial atmosphere of the opera house rather than the 'real world' alluded to by the author. The Italian's work was of course couched in the language of the opera house as it was written for performance in the eighteenth century. However, rather than rhapsodising about the musicality of the Italian's work and the beauty of the words, in the criticism, the poetry is described as simpering syllables and languid accents. Although anonymous, the attack on Metastasio was most probably written by the Irish antiquarian John O'Donovan who was deeply involved in the translation of Irish Gaelic texts into English and in valorising the Irish tradition.⁷

O'Donovan's criticisms were very much in harmony with other British rejections of Metastasio which began to emerge in this period and which also featured in Ireland – the *Dublin University Magazine* for example referred in 1839 to the 'turgid declamations of Metastasio' (Jan-

⁷ See Chuto (1976)

uary 1839). Due to his centrality to the Italian canon, Metastasio came to be perceived as emblematic of all the limitations of Italian literature at this time. Bulwer Lytton condemned Metastasio as part of ‘a feeble and ephemeral school of the Italians’ and the Italian poet was also denounced by G.H. Lewes and John Ruskin (Pite 2006). In 1837 Landor commented that ‘The Abbé Metastasio ... has but little flame and fire in him, and ... has buckets and rain-water enough to extinguish ten times the quantity.’⁸ Another reviewer wrote that ‘the exquisite purity of his language, the occasional felicity of his plots, the elegant faultlessness of his manner and the music of his verse, were rapidly confirming the prejudice that effeminacy was the distinguishing character of Italian literature.’⁹ The decline in the popularity of Metastasio arose from a certain fatigue with his style and overexposure to his work. The Italian language and Metastasio’s poetry were furthermore deemed to be effeminate and not strong or manly enough for the real local passions.¹⁰

In harmony with these general trends, O’Donovan denounced Metastasio as unsuitable and expressed a preference for local and more ‘natural’ compositions and translations. Therefore, in reaction to the Metastasio translation, he instead proposed a translation of a poem composed in the Irish language by Alfred, King of the Northumbrian Saxons, during his exile in Ireland around the year A.D. 685. In introducing the translation of this work, the writer said of Mangan:

Our friend’s challenge will have this effect: instead of setting us a hunting after prettily turned conceits, expressed in mellifluous syllabics, it will only stimulate our previously-formed intention of entering the MINE of ancient Irish literature, and bring out from the obscurity of oblivion those treasures of intellect and genius and antiquarian curiosity which are there to be found. (*Dublin Penny Journal*, 15 September 1832)

⁸ Quoted in Brand (1957, 102)

⁹ Quoted in Brand (1957, 102). The review was published anonymously in the *Quarterly Review*. In 1819, during a discussion in an Irish newspaper of the Italian language, it had already been observed that ‘where strength is required and bold sentiments are to be clothed in appropriate language, we think the Italian will be found far behind its illustrious parent.’ (*Freemans Journal*, 15 April 1819)

¹⁰ Thomas Babington Macaulay for example said of the Italian language that ‘It is a general opinion, among those who know little or nothing of the subject, that this admirable language is adapted only to the effeminate cant of sonneteers, musicians and connoisseurs’ Quoted in Brand, 43.

Anne O'Connor

A translation from the Irish language was thus put forward as an alternative to Metastasio and the literary tradition that he represented. Mangan was not too impressed by this alternative and wrote back questioning if the editor really thought that the alternative proposed was superior to the work by Metastasio. He then included some more lines from Metastasio and said that 'the following Arias are from that great dramatist, whose language you say is that 'of affectation' and 'more adapted to the opera house' than to what? 'the simplicity of the common feelings of humanity'!! Mangan included in this rebuttal a translation of the aria XXIX 'Se a ciascun l'interno affanno/ Si leggesse in fronte scritto', a translation which, as Francesca Romana Paci has pointed out, was not in fact by Mangan himself but rather by the Irish poet Charlotte Nooth. She had originally published this translation of Metastasio in her collection entitled *Original Poems* in London in 1815 (Paci 2014, 194).¹¹ Mangan's second offering on Metastasio was derivative and symptomatic of the perceived limitations of the Italian writer. Although some Irish translators continued to translate works by Metastasio well into the nineteenth century, the discussion on the pages of the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1832 can be considered a moment of divergence when, instead of embracing the Italianate fashion, Irish translators turned their gaze elsewhere for inspiration and cultural transfer.

Venuti has shown that a translation reveals historical continuities and divergences between the two languages and cultures it brings into contact, and that moreover, not only is every stage in the production of a translation profoundly marked by its historical moment, but its circulation and reception inevitably trace a history that is distinct from the destiny of the foreign text (Venuti 2005, 801). The historical moment in Ireland in 1832 showed a rejection of Metastasio and the tradition that he represented. Despite his previous popularity both in music and translation, by the mid-nineteenth century in some quar-

¹¹ It is unclear whether Mangan was attempting to pass this translation off as his own work as the contribution is not signed and the translation is used to support an argument rather than as a work in itself. Given the extent of translations from Metastasio into English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were many 'verbal borrowings' and some outright plagiarisms. See for example Fucilla (1952, 33) where he illustrates a 'flagrant case of plagiarism' in Metastasio translations.

ters, he was no longer deemed relevant to the Irish context. As can be seen in translations of his works, the Italian's moment of great popularity was most certainly the eighteenth and early nineteenth century; by 1882, *The Nation* could refer to the 'well-nigh forgotten Italian dramatist Metastasio' (1 September 1882).

Conclusion

Metastasio was not a controversial figure in terms of religion, politics and morals, and so he appealed to translators from a variety of backgrounds and religious persuasions. The Italian librettist's flexible attraction meant that a wide cross-section of Irish people was able to access and to translate his works. Some Italian authors, such as Boccaccio, fell foul of moral codes of the nineteenth century (Armstrong 2013), others were deemed linguistically challenging, while others again were seen to identify too closely with the values of the Italian Risorgimento which was unpopular in Catholic Ireland due to the threat it posed to the Papal States. Italian translations from Metastasio on the other hand were considered in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to be acceptable and culturally appropriate for Ireland. Spurred on by the multilingual world of opera and music, Metastasio was a very popular and translated writer in Ireland in this period and his language, music and the translations of his work contributed greatly to an Italianate fashion. The Italian became engrained in the Irish education system and he was for Irish translators the ultimate poet of music and performance. However, this non-threatening nature ultimately led to a decline in interest in Metastasio as he was considered by some to be less 'real' and his sentiments less relevant to life in Ireland. Having experienced Arcadian literature and the Italian lyrical world, in the mid-nineteenth century, Irish authors and translators turned their attention elsewhere; the Metastasio moment was over.

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