

Translating foreign space and landscape: The Mother by Grazia Deledda

by Eleonora Fois*

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The Spatial Turn in Translation Studies (Italiano 2015, 4) is pointing out that translation is not just a matter of cultural transfer but a place where new spaces are created (Wolf 2002). In narrative texts, the text world is negotiated by both the author and the reader through discourse, but the translator makes such negotiation more complex. The translation of space and landscape can thus shape the image (hence, the reception) of foreign authors in the target culture, thereby reinforcing the interest in translation as a key player in world literature (Bassnett 2018). This paper draws on this framework to conduct an ecostylistic analysis of space and landscape in the English translation of Grazia Deledda's novel *La Madre*. Deledda's language of space originates from a subjective perception and performs a clear narratological function. In translation, however, the source author's identity overlaps with the translator's subjectivity, which impacts on the target text with political and ideological consequences (Venuti 1995). The reinterpretation of space and the rewriting process are then affected by the translator's identity, the relationship between central and peripheral cultures and the consequent ideological and cultural issues. In order to discover whether Sardinia changes when filtered through the translator's mind, culture and language, this paper will focus on a contrastive analysis of *The Mother (La Madre)*, published in 1922. The translational choices related to space, nature and landscape – as features affecting intercultural communication and the reception of foreign authors – will be discussed with a view to understanding if and how the perception of Sardinia changes from source to target text.

Keywords: ecotranslation, ecostylistics, Deledda, landscape, translator's subjectivity.

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1. Introduction

Literature has long been considered as an art of time (Parker 2014). Joseph Frank's study on literature and space forms (1945) started a shift and sparked a deeper interest in the subject. The human experience is shaped by space and time, which in turn influence all narratives, as discourses of human experience (Genette 1980). Narratives imply a world with spatial extension: such space refers to the space of the story world or the physical environment in which the characters live. Being a part of a reconstructed world, space in narrative depends upon language selection, points of view and temporal lines (Zoran 1984).

Description, often regarded as the antithesis of narration, is the major discourse strategy to communicate information on space. The real-world space often serves as a context and a referent to narrative texts, but landscape description has an ekphrastic status that goes beyond simply setting the scene (Eggan 2018). In order to understand the spatial description, the reader needs to envisage a mental picture, a 'text world' (Werth 1995). Such a conceptual construct is negotiated by both the author and the reader through discourse. The negotiation, however, becomes more complex when translation is involved.

This paper will then focus on landscape descriptions in Mary G. Steegmann's 1922 translation of Grazia Deledda's novel *La Madre* (*The Mother*). The description of a landscape and the experiencing of that landscape, in personal and social terms, are inseparable. Thus, far from being a mere objective description of natural elements, Deledda's language of space is highly subjective and performs various narratological functions. In translation, however, the source author's perception overlaps (or even clashes) with the translator's subjectivity, which impacts on the target text (henceforth: TT) in various ways and with political and ideological consequences (Venuti 1995). The translational choices related to space, nature and landscape will be analyzed with a view to detecting the influence of the translator's cultural framework and subjective interpretation. Deledda's landscape descriptions have been investigated from a stylistic perspective (Casu 1992; Puppo 1992; Mortara Garavelli 1992; Johnson 2010), but no studies have dealt specifically with their features in English translation. This paper thus intends to discover the transformations of the translated space within the narrative and the way Sardinia changes when filtered through the translators' mind, culture and language.

2. *Translation and Space*

Little is known about the impact of translation on the target reader's interpretation of space (Bernaerts, De Bleeker, De Wilde, 2014), but the issue is gaining more and more attention. From Apter's notion of spatial awareness and 'translational transnationalism' (2006, 87) to Simon's discussion of the role of translation in shaping the co-existing identities within urban spaces (2012), the Spatial Turn (Italiano 2016: 4) in Translation Studies is pointing out that translation is not just a matter of cultural transfer but a place where new spaces are created (Wolf 2002). Even with no significant alterations, the translator is always there, although the reader is unaware of their presence (Hermans 1996).

The negentropic function of translation (Cronin 2006, 130) produces newness out of precarious cultural negotiation, originating 'imaginative or perceived geographies' (Saïd 2014: 73). The geographical consciousness through which we orientate ourselves also determines the way we invent and position the Other in our universe. Consequently, every representation of physical and geographical data is related to a discourse shaped by power and knowledge. The underlying relations of power are evident in every stage of translation, from the choice of the source text (henceforth: ST) to the creation and dissemination of the TT (Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell 2017: 1). Translation moves across space and time, culture and history, local and globalized discourses. Being at the core of the circulation of knowledge, translation has the power to shape ideas. The dominant political and ideological forces exert influence on translation behaviour. Therefore, every translation mirrors the ideology of its time (Toury 2012). According to Toury and Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, once the translated text has become part of the target culture's repertoire, it will build new paradigms, or modify existing ones (Badenes and Coisson, 2015: 360). Suffice it to recall the French approach which originated the *belles infidèles* to understand the process and the possible products.

The reinterpretation of space and the rewriting process are generally affected by three elements: the translator's identity, the relationship between central and peripheral cultures, and the consequent ideological and cultural issues. Thus, the translational choices related to space and landscape contribute to defining the image (hence, influencing the reception) of foreign authors in the target culture, which reinforces the current interest in translation as a key player in world literature (Bassnett 2018).

Ecotranslation focuses on the way the TT is manipulated to give prominence to a specific idea of nature, with three main approaches: the first approach involves retranslating literary works where the voice of nature was silenced. The second approach involves translating for the first time texts with an ecological cosmovision. The third approach involves the manipulation of works which did not originally present an ecological vision, so as to create a new and ecological text (Badenes, Coisson 2015: 360). This contribution partially draws on the first approach to verify whether or not the voice of Deledda's Sardinia was silenced or neutralized in the translation of *La Madre*.

Ecostylistics will provide the framework for the analysis. Ecostylistics explores the stylistic and/or ideological underpinning for how the physical environment is presented in texts (Douthwaite, Viridis, Zurru 2017: 2). It explores how a text comes to convey a certain stance and helps raise awareness of the ways in which languages emphasize and de-emphasize aspects of the environment (Fill and Muhlhauser 2001: 3). Despite the lack of studies which apply ecostylistics to translation (Zerkowitz 2017), ecostylistics is ideal to analyse those patterns in literary texts which are generally excluded from ecolinguistic consideration, but which still uncover the translator's approach with regards to nature and landscape. Finally, it helps reveal how a certain culture lives the dilemma between the desire of contact and the 'challenging reality of difference' (Cronin 2006, 133).

In Deledda's writing, nature and landscape reveal specific cultural frameworks and perform clear narratological functions. As demonstrated by Even Zohar's polysystem theory, the way peripheral cultures are interpreted and framed by dominant cultures depends on the latter's ability to understand and engage with the Other. Peripheral cultures are usually the victims of central cultures, from a cultural/political perspective (Falchi and Gandini 2010, 99). The contrastive analysis will thus verify whether the approach to the translation of landscape-related references depends on the underlying framework of the target culture and the relationship of power between the two cultures involved. The analysis will also aim to verify whether the translation reiterates the stereotypical interpretation of Sardinia as a mysterious, magical, and savage land which originated in – and was later reinforced by – strongly prejudiced travel accounts from the eighteenth-century (Atzeni 1999).

3. *Grazia Deledda*

Since her debut in 1888, Grazia Deledda published more than forty

novels and numerous short stories. She was Italy's first and only woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. In his award presentation, Henrik Schück observed that the discovery of Sardinia belonged to Grazia Deledda (Pagani, Frier 2017: 149), whose humble characters 'germinate[d] in the Sardinian soil [...] with something in them of the grandeur of the Sardinian natural setting'¹. Despite a conservative critical establishment dismissing her Nobel Prize and her international fame as superior to her merits and deeming her writing mediocre at best (Serra 1914; Galletti 1967), this self-educated woman entered the inner circle of world literature.

The Italian critical reception was not very well founded until the 1970s and framed Deledda as a specific regional writer (Aste 1990), suspended between 'verismo' (Cecchi 1957; De Michelis 1938; Magistro 2007) and 'decadentismo'. The emphasis on regionalism (Capuana 1898), which Deledda strongly resented, was more the justification for diminishing her potential than the acknowledgement of the cultural background for her study of characters. Those who focused solely on her portrait of Sardinia and Sardinians (the novels of the so-called 'Sardinian cycle' [Casula 2010: 129]) failed to acknowledge the variety of her production and the pivotal role of space in inspiring all her novels. The novels of the 'Continental cycle', for instance, are all set between Rome (where she lived most of her life after her marriage in 1901), Cervia, and Cicognara (where she spent her summer holidays)². Deledda was always inspired by the places she experienced, and the characters of her novels were introduced accordingly: shepherds and humble workers were replaced by bourgeois and artists. In Deledda's words, this change was 'new and deep' (De Giovanni 2017: 24). As Marcello Fois, author of the 2018 play *Quasi Grazia* said, Deledda's work escaped the familiar Italian categories, making her a foreigner in her own country³.

Since the turn of the millennium, Deledda's work has reached new visibility, not least among Italianists outside Italy (Heyer-

¹ Cf. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1926/ceremony-speech/>.

² *Nostalgia* was set between Cicognara and Roma, *L'ombra del passato* between Cicognara and Viadana, *Sino al confine* and *Nel deserto* between Sardinia and Rome; *Il Segreto dell'Uomo solitario* and *La Fuga in Egitto* are set in Cervia; *La danza della collana* is set in a big city which is probably Rome. *Annalena Bilsini* in Cicognara; *Il paese del vento* in Cervia; *L'argine* in Rome.

³ 'Nobel di frontiera. Grazia Deledda e Selma Lagerlöf nella storia della letteratura mondiale' with Siri Ranva Hjelm Jacobsen, Marcello Fois and Katia De Marco, 'Festival Femminile Plurale' 24th November 2018, Cagliari.

Caput 2008). The relationship between the author and her native land remains the focus. Despite the economic, social and cultural conditions of nineteenth-century Sardinia being the greater obstacle to Deledda's literary ambition (Kozma 2007), the role of Sardinia as 'the unifying force' of Deledda's best writing (King 2005: 103-104) is firmly established. Deledda's symbiosis with her homeland, found in the novels of the 'Sardinian cycle', could not be either recreated in or matched by the urban settings of her following production.

3.1. Deledda's space

In Deledda's early, romantic phase (1888-1893, [Fuller 2000: 65]), Sardinia performs a purely decorative role. The landscape becomes more real and true to life in the middle phase (1894-1899). Only with the publication of *Elías Portolu* (in 1900) will this realistic world become the vehicle for the universal moral vision of Deledda's major works, to which *La madre* also belongs (Sari 2001: 66). Despite some discordant voices⁴, the stark and austere Sardinian landscape is generally interpreted as the lyrical projection of the character's struggles (Miccinesi 1975: 20). Landscape works as 'the primordial stage for the theatre of existence' (my translation, Sari 2001: 44): it is 'predisposed to adapt to the events or the character's emotion and able to act as a static framework for the single storylines' (Scrivano 1990: 24).

Given the strong autobiographical nature of Deledda's writing, the accurate landscape descriptions of her novels are inspired by existing, recognizable places (Bitti *et al.* 1974: 196). 'Colours, lights and voices of nature allow the reader to truly look into the souls of the characters who in turn only open up when immersed in the open nature' (Massaiu 1972: 133, my translation). Nature often features in metaphors and similes, where it is exploited to evoke physical traits (Casu, 1992: 183), as in *La Madre*: 'la madre ogni tanto vedeva gli occhi vaganti e inquieti del figlio fermarsi, diventar duri e opachi come di pietra, ottenebrati dalla notte interna' (115); 'la bocca s'era sfatta, e la pelle delle labbra, d'un colore rosa grigiastro, ricordava i petali appassiti delle rose' (187). Deledda's nature is an intrinsic part of the narrator's experience.

⁴ According to Barberi Squarotti (1974: 129), for instance, the natural descriptions are the main cause of alienation from the rest of the narration: landscape does not fulfil any ideological function. Anna Dolfi (1979: 72) stated that the Deleddian landscape was geographically anonymous, with no specific connotations.

From a translational point of view, this deeply interiorized language requires an interpretative effort to try to understand the emotional connections embedded in the text. It is the identification with nature filtering from both narrator and characters which shapes the emotive force of the text. Landscape thus becomes a crucial determinant in the translation strategy.

According to Pittau, 'Grazia Deledda's style is transparent: the reader's attention is not captivated by stylistic mannerisms but by the stories, the characters, the atmosphere' (my translation, Pittau 1974: 158). Deledda was bilingual: as her many drafts suggest, careful revisions were needed to erase the influence of the Nuorese dialect on her Italian (Pittau 1974, 160). Dialogues with a distinct Sardinian influence are thus to be interpreted as a voluntary stylistic choice. From a lexical point of view, *La Madre* is the first novel without calques, dialectisms, and typical local expressions, such as invectives, that had characterized her previous novels (Lavinio 1992: 70).

The evolution of Deledda's descriptive style is marked by a sensitivity for gradations of colour, especially red, and great attention to sound sensations. According to Bice Mortara Garavelli (1992: 128), Deledda's lexical choices favour the creation of verbal paintings, visually translatable in terms of contrasts and chiaroscuro (Mortara Garavelli 1992: 129). The intrinsic translatability of Deledda's language is also determined by the absence of a convoluted syntax. While her preference for paratactic structures is evident, the alternation between coordination and subordination is not referential but rather expressive: it reflects the hierarchies of the feelings being portrayed.

3.2. Deledda in Translation

The fact that the majority of translations (at present) draw on the 'Sardinian cycle', which was judged as the highest point of Deledda's inspiration, cannot be a coincidence:

- *After the Divorce – A Romance*, translated by Maria Hornor Lansdale (New York, H. Holt and company, 1905);
- *Nostalgia*, translated by Helen Hester Colville (London, Chapman and Hall, 1905).
- *Ashes: A Sardinian Story*, translated by Helen Hester Colvill (London & New York, John Lane, 1908;
- *The Woman and the Priest*, translated by Mary G. Steegmann (London, J. Cape 1922, later republished as *The Mother* (New York,

- Macmillan, 1923; Second edition: London, J. Cape, 1928 and New York, Macmillan, 1928; third edition: Dedalus, London, 1987);
- *Cosima*, translated by Martha King (New York, Italica, 1988);
 - *Chiaroscuro and Other Stories*, translated by Martha King (London, Quartet, 1994);
 - *After the Divorce*, translated by Susan Ashe (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1995).
 - *Elias Portolu*, translated by Martha King (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1995);
 - *Reeds in the Wind*, translated by Martha King (New York, Italica Press, 1999);
 - *The church of solitude*, translated by E. Ann Matter (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2002).
 - *Ashes*, translated by Janice M. Kozma (Madison, N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004);
 - *Marianna Sirca*, translated by Janice M. Kozma (Fairleigh, Dickinson University Press, 2006);
 - *Honest Souls*, translated by Janice M. Kozma (Leicester, Troubador Publishing, 2009).

This list of translation confirms the fascination of the target culture for the peripheral and foreign Sardinia, whose exotic promise of unknown and mystery had been triggering the readers' imagination since the 18th century (Fois 2014). The novels of the Sardinian cycle are also believed to underlie the essence of the Mediterranean civilizations (De Giovanni 2017: 37): this might have been a further motivation for the exclusion of the 'continental' novels, perceived as less significant or less representative of the Mediterranean image.

3.3. The Mother

The analysis will thus be conducted on *La Madre*, translated into English by Mary G. Steegmann⁵. Despite being the third translated novel, *La Madre* is Deledda's best-known work outside Italy (Magill 1987: 332;

⁵ Research for information concerning Steegmann's literary activity reveals that she translated only from Italian. In addition to *The Mother*, which is apparently her last work, she also translated *Tales from Sacchetti* (*Il Trecentonovelle*, Franco Sacchetti, 1724) (London, Dent 1908); *The Book of Divine consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno* (London: Chatto and Windus 1909); *Women of Florence* (*La donna fiorentina del buon tempo antico*, 1906) by Isidoro Del Lungo, 1908. She also authored the biography of Bianca Cappello, an Italian noblewoman and second wife of Francesco I de' Medici (London, Constable and Company 1913).

Migiel 1994: 114). The first English edition, which came out in 1922, was initially entitled *The Woman and the Priest* (probably appealing to the readers' curiosity). The title will be changed in *The Mother* for the second edition of the novel, published in 1928 (hence, after the Nobel Prize) with an introduction by D. H. Lawrence. The last edition came out in 1987 and sparked the rediscovery of Grazia Deledda and new translations (*Cosima* by Martha King will be published a year later).

At the core of *La madre* is psychological and emotional torture. Paulo, the priest of the small village of Aar, falls in love with a woman, Agnese, who returns his affection. Once his mother, Maria Maddalena, understands the danger, she urges Paulo to put an end to the affair. Overcoming his initial doubts, Paulo decides to give up on Agnese, who then threatens to expose him during the Sunday Mass. In the final scene, set in the village church, Agnese relents, Paulo regains his faith but the mother, weakened by the pain, dies in silent agony.

Very useful to retrace Steegmann's approach is the Preface to the novel, where Sardinia is briefly presented as Deledda's homeland and the suggestive scenario of the story. Steegmann introduces 'the remote and only half-civilized hill village of Aar', with 'its wild and rugged background' (1922, v): the recurrence of the motifs used to frame Sardinia in eighteenth-century travel accounts indicate acceptance of that interpretation. Steegmann's attention, however, is rather devoted to the psychological struggles of the main characters and the religious dichotomy between the sacred and the profane.

The 1928 London Cape edition features an *Introduction* by D.H. Lawrence. Some of his private letters already anticipate Lawrence's interest in the novel:

the main interest of the book lies [...] in the presentation of sheer instinctive life [...]. An old woman who has never had any sex life – and it is astonishing, in barbaric half-civilization – [...] succeeds, by her old barbaric maternal power over her son, in finally killing his sex life too. It is the suicide of semi-barbaric natures' (King 2005: 165).

The same themes are found in the *Introduction*⁶: the reference to 'an old mystery in the air [...] as there is over some old Druid places, the mystery of an unevolved people' (Lawrence 2005: 103) echoes the ideas of *Sea and Sardinia*. Lawrence once more stresses the isolation of the island, 'still a good deal off the map' (104). Eloquent recurring

⁶ Later converged into *Selected literary criticism*, edited by A. Beal, Melbourne-London-Toronto, 1955, pp. 291-95.

adjectives are ‘fierce, savage, barbaric’ combined with ‘ancient’ and connected to both ‘the human instinct still uncontaminated’ and ‘the indescribable tang of the aboriginal people of the island’ (104). In Lawrence’s opinion, Deledda had managed ‘to create the passionate complex of a primitive populace’ (103).

At present, the overall scarcity of reviews of texts translated from Italian in the 1920s (Baer 2019: 14) does not allow to further investigate the reception of the novel. Nevertheless, it emerges from both the Preface and the Introduction that Sardinia is framed as an exotic, ‘barbaric’ setting. The analysis will verify the impact of these motifs on Steegmann’s translation.

4. *The contrastive analysis*

The following contrastive analysis⁷ will bring out the distinctive features of the novel in terms of space and discuss the outcome of the translational choices related to landscape and nature, starting from those related to Sardinia’s flora and specific geographical references:

ST	Gli <u>ontani</u> in fila davanti al parapetto della piazza della chiesa [...](1920, 7)
TT	The <u>elder</u> trees which grew along the parapet of the piazza before the church [...] (1928, 7).

4.1. ‘Elder’ could be interpreted as:

1. An adjective indicating the age of the trees. The precision of the noun in the ST, which reveal Deledda’s familiarity with the landscape, is thus neutralized.
2. A typographical error or the misspelling of ‘Alder’ (the direct translation of ‘ontano’, *Alnus glutinosa*) which was not corrected in the 1923 American edition nor the 1928 British edition.
3. The common name of ‘Sambucus’ (*Sambucus nigra*, a small tree). Given the difference in height between an Alder and a Sambucus, however, this shift has a significant impact on the recreation of the foreign landscape in the target readers’ mind.

In the ST, the trees are defined by the phrase ‘in fila’, which is normally associated to human beings (children waiting for the bell of

⁷ The methodology related to strategies, procedures and techniques is based on Vinay and Dalbernet (1995) and Malone (1988).

the last school hour to ring, for instance). In the TT, this expression is replaced by ‘grow along’: the verb referring to the trees is still active, but neutral and unconnotated.

- ST** [...] due fila di casupole serpeggianti ai due lati di una strada che andava a perdersi fra le macchie della vallata (1920, 7).
- TT** [...] the two lines of cottages on either side of the steep road which wound on and downwards till it lost itself amidst the trees in the valley (1928, 6).

‘Macchia’ is a noun which defines the typical Mediterranean landscape. The neutralization found in the general noun ‘trees’ results in a different configuration of the landscape: ‘macchia’ is an ensemble of densely growing shrubs, not a group of trees. Moreover, despite the effort to preserve the idea of a sinuous movement, the adjective referring to the ‘casupole’ in the ST becomes a noun referring to the road in the TT.

Equally misleading is the translation of ‘casupole’ with ‘cottages’. The noun ‘cottage’ originally referred to a house with a ground floor living area and an upper floor with one or more bedrooms. While the priest’s house can be defined as a cottage (an upper floor is often mentioned, and the priest’s social status allowed and justified a more refined house), peasants’ houses were characterized by a single multi-purpose room. The choice of ‘cottage’ certainly deviates the target reader’s image from both the spatial dimensions and the main characteristics of a nineteenth-century Sardinian village as described in the ST.

- ST** Pareva [...] ascoltasse solo il mormorio del vento fra i li[n]terni, che pareva il lontano sciabordio del mare (1920, 131).
- TT** He [...] sat listening to the wind as if it were the distant murmur of the sea (1928, 133).

‘Linterno’ (*Rhamnus alaternus*, also known as Alaterno) is one of the names of Buckthorn, a typical Mediterranean plant. Deledda’s precision in naming the elements of the natural landscape is once more ignored in the TT.

There is, however, one case of overtranslation:

- ST** Si mise a camminare [...] sotto gli alberelli coperti di foglioline d’oro (1920, 68).
- TT** Paul [...] began to walk [...] beneath the aspens covered with little golden leaves (1928, 49).

Steedmann translates ‘small trees’ with ‘aspens’ (*Populus tremuloides*), whose Italian translation is ‘pioppi’: this substitution thus determines a shift in the features of the landscape. Despite Deledda’s recurring use of the adjective ‘golden’ to metaphorically describe items hit by sunlight⁸, Steedmann might have misinterpreted ‘golden leaves’ as a literal reference. This misinterpretation creates incoherence in the TT, for aspen leaves only turn yellow in autumn but the novel is set in spring, during Easter time.

In one example, the translation is highly misleading:

- ST** Il chiarore [...] illuminava il prato erboso,
la piazzetta sterrata davanti alla chiesa e alla parrocchia (1920, 6).
TT The *uncertain* light [...] illumined the *long* grass of the field,
the little raised piazza in front of the church and presbytery (1928, 6).

The noun ‘piazza’⁹ brings to mind a specific type of Renaissance square, radically different from a typical nineteenth-century Sardinian village. Moreover, the premodifier ‘raised’ conveys a different spatial image: ‘sterrata’ was probably interpreted as the past participle of ‘sterrare’ (‘to remove land’), thus losing the image of an unpaved street. The combination of these choices leads to the neutralization of the architectural features of the village as described in the ST.

- ST** Il cielo era d’un azzurro latteo,
l’aria calda e molle per il vento di levante (1920, 68).
TT The sky was all a milky blue,
the air soft and warm with the light wind from the eastern hills (1928, 69).

The Levant wind is typical of the Mediterranean region. Despite the direct English equivalent being available, the amplification in the postmodifier ‘from the eastern hills’ is now describing the position of the hills rather than the direction of the wind. While ‘hill’ and ‘mountain’ are fairly equivalent¹⁰ in English and used

⁸ ‘La luce verde e dorata del finestrino’ (1920, 102); ‘la luna grande dorata (1920, 145).

⁹ 1580s, “open public square in an Italian town”, Online Etymology Dictionary. Cf. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/piazza>.

¹⁰ Online Etymology Dictionary: ‘The term mountain is very loosely used. It commonly means any unusual elevation. In New England and central New York, elevations of from one to two thousand feet are called hills, but on the plains of Texas, a hill of a few hundred feet is called a mountain’ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/hill>. Today, ‘Hills are easier to climb than mountains. They are less steep and

interchangeably in Steegmann's Preface¹¹, Deledda only refers to 'mountains', with no occurrence of the noun 'collina' in the ST. This shift shapes the visual and mental representation of the landscape: the hill evokes a gentler landscape, while the mountain reminds of peaks and steep sides.

Neutralization, amplification and rewriting with significant shifts appear to be Steegmann's most frequent translation techniques with regards to specific geographical references. The descriptions of the natural elements will be explored in the following section.

4.2. In Deledda's novels, descriptions of nature are normally filtered through the characters' eyes and natural elements complement the characters' emotions: the wind is often chosen to perform this narrative function.

ST Paulo ebbe anche lui l'impressione che il vento avesse qualche cosa di vivo, di ambiguo [...] (1920, 43).

TT He too had the sensation that there was something alive, something ghostly, undefinable in the wind[...] (1928, 43).

In this passage, the priest's emotional turmoil is stressed by two adjectives describing the wind as 'vivo' and 'ambiguo'. In the TT, the former is directly translated – 'alive' – while the latter is partially substituted with 'undefinable' and, most importantly, amplified with 'ghostly'. This stylistic interpretation adds a supernatural connotation that was absent in the ST.

ST Forse tendeva anche lui l'orecchio ai rumori intorno. Solo il vento continuava a sbattersi contro la casa (1920, 4).

TT Perhaps he, too, was listening to the sounds without, but there was nothing to be heard save the encircling wind beating ever against the house (1928, 4).

In the TT, the archaism 'without' explicitly creates a divide between the inside and the outside which is the opposite of what is conveyed by the adverb 'intorno' in the ST. The amplification of 'encircling' as

not as high. But, like a mountain, a hill will usually have an obvious summit, which is its highest point' (<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/hill/>).

¹¹ 'The Mother is an unusual book, both in its story and its setting in a remote Sardinian hill village' (v); 'in her native island of Sardinia, with its wild and rugged background of mountain, rock, and wide tracts of thicket and shrub' (viii).

a premodifier of ‘wind’ stresses the idea of oppression, whereas in the ST the verb ‘sbattersi’ conveys violence and energy.

ST Così il suo Paulo poté scendere silenzioso la scaletta, aprire la porta e andarsene: il vento parve portarselo via d’un colpo (1920, 5).

TT Thus Paul could steal noiselessly downstairs, open the door and go out, and the wind seemed to engulf him and bear him away in a flash (1928, 4).

The lexical amplification of the verb ‘engulf’ further reinforces the idea of the wind as an implacable entity. In the ST, the pause provided by the colons imposes a precise rhythm and gives prominence to the wind, while the TT builds tension by accumulating images via polysyndetic coordination.

Equally important is the change of the point of view determined by the omission of the possessive pronoun (‘il suo Paulo’): in the TT the scene is viewed from the narrator’s perspective, while the ST is focused on the mother’s tension. As visible from this excerpt, the character’s names are domesticated except for the mother, the only character whose name is not translated¹².

ST Gli ontani in fila davanti al parapetto
della piazza della chiesa
si sbattevano furiosi al vento,
neri e sconvolti come mostri;
al loro fruscio rispondeva il lamento dei pioppi
e dei canneti della valle:
e a tutto quel dolore notturno, all’ansito del vento e al naufragare
della luna fra le nuvole,
si confondeva l’angoscia agitata della madre che inseguiva il figlio
(1920, 7-8).

TT The elder trees which grew along the parapet
of the piazza before the church
were bending and tossing furiously in the wind,
black and shapeless monsters in the gloom,
and in answer to their rustling cry came the lament of the poplars
and reeds in the valley.
And in all this dolour of the night, the moaning wind
and the moon drownin midst the angry clouds,
was merged the sorrow of the mother seeking for her son
(1928, 7).

¹² At present, no first-hand account from Steegmann was found, nor was it possible to retrace a review of the translated novel or other paratextual documents which could help shed some light on the reasons for this choice.

Deledda seems to exploit the ambiguity of 'sconvolto', which might mean 'squassato dal vento (shaken by the wind, GDLI, 195) or 'in preda a una profonda emozione (in the grip of strong emotions, GDLI, 195). Steegmann might have narrowed the meaning down to the latter, substituting with 'shapeless' to avoid humanizing the natural element.

The amplified adjunct 'in the gloom' and the recategorization of the noun 'fruscio' as the premodifier 'rustling' convey the idea of a common lament of nature (whose botanic diversity has been represented) and anticipates the adjunct 'doulour of the night'.

The translation of 'ansito' ('breath') with 'moan' relates to the previous sentence and gives dramatic emphasis. Furthermore, 'moaning wind' and 'moon drowning' combine to create a chiasitic structure enriched by alliteration ('moaning', 'moon', 'midst').

Steegmann's textual manipulation is confirmed by the amplification of the premodifier 'angry' and the translation of 'inseguire' with 'seek' ('attempt to find'): this shift originates another alliteration 'sorrow-seek-son', which further heightens the TT's lyrical tone.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| ST | Si, nei tempi passati egli vegliava la notte studiando;
la finestra avanti a lui s'apriva sul ciglione fiorito di stelle;
l'usignuolo <u>cantava</u> per lui (1920, 30). |
| TT | There had been a time when he used to study far into the night:
the stars over the ridge looked in at his window and
the nightingales sang him their <u>plaintive</u> notes (1928, 31). |

In the ST, the scene represents the mother's perspective (as confirmed by the reinforcing 'sì'): in her mind, nature harmoniously participates in her son's supposed happiness. In the TT, the stars are recategorized and become the subject of the verb 'to look', with a possible compensation technique transforming them into active agents. The amplification of the premodifier 'plaintive' disrupts the mother's idyllic vision, signalling that the point of view has shifted to the omniscient narrator.

These examples confirm that Steegmann's frequent use of amplification enhances the dramatic effect of the natural elements. The next section will focus on cases of reduction and omission.

4.3. The anthropocentrism of language perpetuates the distance between humans and the rest of creation (Fill and Muhlhauser 2001: 5). Thus, it predisposes readers towards a certain perception. In translation, it uncovers the (more or less conscious) vision of the

relationship between nature and human beings in the target culture. The omission or reduction of anthropomorphic references then mirrors the translator's approach and interpretation.

- ST** Nel *paesetto* già più non si vedeva un lume,
un filo di fumo. Dormivano, le povere casette arrampicate
come due file di pecore su per la china erbosa [...] (1920, 7)
- TT** In the *village* itself not a light was to be seen,
nor even a thread of smoke. They were all asleep by now
in the poverty-stricken cottages,
which clung to the grassy hill-side like two rows of sheep (1928, 7).

In the ST, the houses are anthropomorphised and interpreted as living beings now asleep. In the TT, the metaphor is omitted and the noun phrase 'the houses' loses prominence by being recategorised as the adjunct. This passage also shows Deledda's systematic use of alteration. The ST features 27 occurrences of 'paesetto' and 23 of 'paese', showing a slight preference for alteration expressing affection in the utterances of both the characters and the narrator. This stylistic choice is rarely kept in the TT, where 54 occurrences of 'village' can be found and only 4 of them include the premodifier 'little', which are kept in the characters' utterances. In this example, for instance, the TT stresses the idea of poverty by amplification of the premodifier of 'cottages', but no emotion is conveyed. The omission of both anthropomorphic descriptions and alterations results in the narrator's colder, more detached stance. One of the narrative devices conveying the narrator's intrinsic knowledge of the landscape, hence the narrator's connection to the context of the novel, is gone.

- ST** Il vento fuori strisciava più intenso [...] (1920, 12).
- TT** Outside the wind moaned and whistled more loudly still [...] (1928, 12).

In the ST the wind is given anthropomorphic characteristics: 'strisciare' implies movement and emphasizes the physicality of the wind in a menacing atmosphere (confirmed by a later reference to the devil). In the TT, the translator chooses two collocates which usually occur with 'wind'. The cultural distance in the perception of nature becomes manifest: the exclusion of many verb collocations (such as think, know, believe) for animals and plants is indicative of a reluctance to accept non-human agents (Fill 2001, 48, Halliday 2001, 194). Amplification is detectable in that the TT features two verbs, 'moan and whistle', none of which expresses the conceptual framework of the ST.

- ST** Paulo si trovò solo, tra la fiammella tremula del lume e la luna che guardava dal finestrino [...] (1920, 147).
- TT** Paul found himself alone, between the flickering flame of the oil lamp and the calm splendour of the moon that shone in through the high window [...] (1928, 149).

In the ST, the moon behaves like a human being and ‘looks through the window’, whereas the TT features a verb which normally occurs with the noun ‘moon’. The amplification of the noun phrase in the TT and the consequent recategorization clearly show the translator’s interference with the ST’s original structure.

The anthropomorphic depiction of animate/inanimate worlds is understood as superstition by those influenced by a scientific world view (Chawla 2001: 118). Thus, anthropomorphic references are not culturally neutral. The tendency to place human beings at the top of the pyramid reveals the underlying belief of their authority over the organic world. A huge part in controlling the principle of ‘human mastery over nature’ was played by religion: as long as religion exercised its power over people, a more pronounced ethical framework was held in place. With the demise of religious constraints, the idea of human domination over nature could grow proportionally. The society of nineteenth-century Sardinia was still deeply influenced by religious awe, often mingled with long-fought superstition¹³ (Martini 1840: 249; Istituto dantesco-europeo 1977: 96). This could explain the role and importance of natural elements in Deledda’s novels not only as a literary choice but also as culturally located reference, but they do not have the same value in the TT.

4.4. The following examples, although not directly landscape-related, reinforce the hypothesis on Steegmann’s approach. Manipulation –

¹³ The theoretical and empirical relationship between religion and nature remains complex. In general terms, the Western Christian world views Nature in materialistic terms, albeit with substantial differences between Protestants, who understand nature in more aggressive and utilitarian terms (especially for Puritans, for whom wilderness was an extension and a reminder of Adam and Eve’s Fall), and Catholics, who continue to acknowledge nature’s symbolic value (Hayes and Marangudakis, 2000: 160). A future research direction will expand on this issue, to try and determine the extent to which religious identification and environmental sensibility in Anglo American contexts might have shaped the translator’s approach.

until here exemplified mostly by amplification – is also noticeable in some invasive reinterpretations and omissions:

- ST** S'era un po' vergognato di sua madre,
perché serva, perché di quel paesetto
di *semplici* (1920, 65).
- TT** He had always been more or less ashamed of his mother
because she was a servant and⁹⁵ came from that village of poor
simpletons (66).
- ST** Il peggio è che quei *semplici* di Aar gli vogliono bene
(1920, 63).
- TT** The worst of it is that the *simpletons* of Aar are attached to the man
(1928, 44).

According to the OED, the word 'simpleton' originated in the mid-seventeenth century, when words meaning 'weak' or 'feeble' shifted to mean 'feeble-minded' or 'stupid'. 'The connotation of 'simple' point in the same direction [...] and *simpleton only has the pejorative meaning*' (Hock and Joseph 1996: 230, emphasis mine). Hence, Steegmann chose a connotated expression to translate a merely denotative noun.

The following example shown the repercussions of Steegmann's predilection for lexical amplification:

- ST** Difficilmente un altro prete avrebbe acconsentito ad *andare*
nel paesetto sperduto (1920, 63).
- TT** He would have great difficulty in finding another priest willing
to *bury himself* in that remote village' (1928, 64).

The ST features the neutral verb 'andare' (to go). Steegmann further emphasizes the adjective 'sperduto' (in the middle of nowhere) by using a verb with an explicitly negative connotation, which mirrors her subjective interpretation.

In the following example, Paulo's admission of his desires is a crucial moment in the novel, which also echoes the debate on the vows of chastity asked of priests:

¹⁴ The isolocón, one of the few voluntary rhetoric devices in the ST, was also ignored.

- ST** Ecco che ritornava alla prima diagnosi del suo male, alla più semplice e giusta:
soffriva perché era uomo,
perché aveva bisogno della donna, del piacere, di generare altri esseri:
soffriva perché lo scopo naturale della vita è di proseguire la vita,
e a lui lo impedivano;
e questo impedimento aumentava lo stimolo del suo bisogno (1920, 76).
- TT** Here he got back to his first simple and correct diagnosis of what ailed him:
 he was unhappy because he was a man
 and was forbidden to lead man's natural life of love and joy and the fulfilment of life's
 natural ends (1928, 76).

The reformulation pivoting on a vague longing for happiness is undoubtedly a form of censorship influenced by political/moral beliefs¹⁵. The same reasons are probably behind the omission of another potentially troubling passage narrating the priest's first sexual encounter:

- ST** Salirono la scaletta di legno che per mezzo d'una botola conduceva alla stanza di sopra, quella del finestrino con la croce contro le tentazioni.
Arrivata la prima, ella si chinò sulla botola, sorridendogli dall'alto, tirandolo su col suo sguardo; e quando anche lui fu nella stanzetta, gli si accostò, quasi volesse misurarsi con lui: con un colpo della mano gli fece saltare dalla testa il berretto, poi cominciò lei, come fosse l'uomo e lui la donna, a sbottonargli la sottana, toccandone i bottoncini rossi con un gusto infantile, così come egli aveva spiccato il grano della resina dal mandorlo fiorito (1920, 74).
- TT** A little wooden staircase ending in a trapdoor gave access to the upper room, the one with the window over which hung a cross as a protection against temptation, and she led him up, snatching his cap from his head and tossing it aside with a laugh (1928, 74).

5. Conclusion

Steedmann's translation shows a significant degree of independence from the structures of the ST, as confirmed by the insertion of rhetoric devices and the frequent adoption of recategorization and redistribution techniques. Furthermore, the omissions – particularly

¹⁵ It is not an unreasonable hypothesis, considering the religious content of some of Steegman's previous translations.

those concerning sex and human desires – combined with neutralization of specific elements from the source culture suggest a domesticating and vaguely censored approach.

Neutralization of the wide majority of the specific botanical terms of the ST points towards the absence of a discourse of diversity (Fill and Muhlhauser 2001: 5). It seems that those peculiar characteristics which give geographical materiality and realness to the Sardinian landscape were deemed a minor determinant of the TT.

Amplification of adjectives and verbs also emerges as a clear technique: even when a direct translation is available, the translator's re-interpretation is favoured. The wide use of amplification has two main consequences. Firstly, it deformed the structure of Deledda's language. As Mortara Garavelli (1992: 118) noticed, Deledda's progressive amendments to the drafts of her novels aimed towards streamlining the sentences by erasing adjectivation and avoiding overtly literary rhetoric choices. According to Lawrence, 'the book, *of course*, loses a good deal in translation, as is inevitable' (Lawrence 2005: 105, emphasis mine), for the rational English language struggles with the purely instinctive Italian language. In Lawrence's opinion, Italian features

many instinct words with meanings never clearly mentally defined [...] nothing is brought to real mental clearness, everything goes by in a stream of more or less vague, more or less realized, feeling, with a natural mist or glow of sensation over everything, that counts more than the actual words said' (105-106).

Deledda's style, however, is profoundly different. Her 'discursive simplicity' (Manca 2015: 204) is far from expressionistic or convoluted. As remarked also in the Nobel Prize presentation speech, Deledda's prose is 'lifelike' and 'simple'. Steegmann's lyricism, which often results from amplification, rather works in the opposite direction.

Secondly, amplification is the means through which the stereotyped vision of Sardinia is reiterated. The emphasis on the most violent aspects of nature conforms to and reinforces the idea of a rough, wild, and primitive Sardinian nature.

The use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors, similes and anthropomorphism shape the idea of a universe shared by the narrator, the characters, and ultimately the reader. The majority of the anthropomorphic references, however, are omitted in the TT: the different alternation of points of view makes the TT narrator's stance more detached and neutral.

All these shifts ultimately result in a portrait of nature as a mere narrative tool highlighting the characters' psychological development. The deeper level, where nature is part of the universe of the narration, fails to be conveyed: the TT increases the distance between the narrator and the readers. Deledda's deep connection to her homeland favoured the depiction of nature as a living entity and an active agent, which was harder to catch, understand and reinterpret by a translator coming from a different cultural dimension and a privileged position, probably less inclined to make the effort.

Landscapes, just like social actions and language, are susceptible to textual interpretation (Barnes and Duncan 2013: 12), all the more so in translation. The analysis has confirmed that landscape and nature are among the variables which reveal different cultural frameworks and affect the identity of the TT. The future stages of this research will include more contemporary translations to verify whether and how these features of the Sardinian landscape have changed.

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