

# Self-Translation in Transcultural Mode: Francesca Duranti on how to Put ‘a Scent of Basil’ into One’s Translations

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## The Theory of the Transcultural Applied to Self-Translation

Self-translation, that is “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself” (Popovič, 1976), has always been present in the literary scene, although this practice has rarely been acknowledged and its study has been most often neglected. More recently, however, a new wave of self-translations into English has sparked a growing interest towards this literary phenomenon and the reasons that lead writers to translate their own work, while at the same time highlighting the role of English as the dominant global lingua franca. Obviously, English as a target language for self-translation is more common in cases where the author has migrated to an English-speaking country or has attended schools that offered programs in English. However, a high level of bilingualism due to growing migratory flows, exile, or transnational lifestyles triggered by post-colonial and post-war developments may encourage self-translation in either direction, as the latest self-translations from English into Italian by the Italian writer Francesca Marciano demonstrate.

Taking Duranti’s self-translation of *Left-Handed Dreams* from Italian into English as a case study, this chapter sets to reveal the hidden dynamics of self-translation seen both as a process – of linguistic mediation, cultural negotiation and/or creative rewriting

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– and as a product – subject to publication trends, market-related restrictions/impositions, readers’ response, and/or critics’ reception. Framing self-translation as both a process and a product is a methodological choice that is particularly rewarding from the heuristic point of view (Grutman and Van Bolderen, 2014). By analyzing it as a process, we can uncover the reasons motivating self-translation, the context(s) within which self-translation occurs, and the processes of cultural identity mediation writers undergo as they move into the role of translators of their work (Taft, 1981). By studying it as a product, through comparative textual analysis between source text and target text we can identify intertextual transfer strategies and modalities of cultural reframing employed by authors when they act as self-translators. The comparative textual analysis may reveal correspondences, (dis) similarities, additions, and/or subtractions, and thus shed light on the translation strategies applied. It can also show in which way and to what extent self-translators challenge (or succumb to) the pressures of translating into another language or extend (culturally, linguistically, and stylistically) the parameters/possibilities of one or both of their assumed languages.

As regards the language combination itself and its relation to the socio-linguistic web of global power dynamics, a disclaimer is here needed. Due to space limitations, the present contribution does not delve into the much-needed discussion about existing asymmetric power relations between languages. Suffice it to say that in the world’s linguistic stock exchange described by de Swaan (2001) and Casanova (2009), and further explored by Grutman (2015), translations (and thus also self-translations) can be called either “horizontal” or “vertical” depending on the value given to the languages involved. They are horizontal when they happen between national languages that have the same linguistic capital; that is, when the languages involved are “equally” juxtaposed, autonomous, dominant, and belong to well-established national literary systems (at any rate according to “canonical” perceptions of such hierarchy as established in the current global *status quo* by the history of unequal colonialist relations).<sup>1</sup> They

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<sup>1</sup> See Casanova (2009).

are vertical translations when they perform languages “de statut trop inégal pour que le transfert puisse ressembler à un échange (mot qui implique une forme de réciprocité)” (Grutman, 2015, p. 21).<sup>2</sup> Vertical translations may further be qualified as “supra-uctions,” if the text is translated with an ascending movement (uphill) from a minor language into a dominant and more central one – from the periphery to the center; and “infraductions,” if the text is translated in the opposite direction, with a descending movement (downhill), from a major and more widespread language into a minor and marginalized one – from the center to the periphery (Grutman, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, the present study adopts a transcultural approach. As Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) suggest, the study and practice of literary translation (thus including self-translation) *are* the study and practice of cultural interaction. Moreover, any literary self-translation also implies some form of cultural construction and creative manipulation or rendition, thus leading to what the writer Octavio Paz calls a process of “poetic transmutation.”<sup>4</sup> It follows from this that the focus is no longer on the assumed faithfulness of the translation to the original text<sup>5</sup> but on conceptually, culturally, and creatively expanding

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<sup>2</sup> “whose status is too unequal to resemble a veritable exchange (a word that implies a form of reciprocity)” (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> The same distinction applies to self-translation, which can be thought of as “*infra*autotraducción” (*infrase*lf-translation) or “*supra*autotraducción” (*suprase*lf-translation; Grutman 2011, p. 81): that is, vertical self-translations between languages that have asymmetrical relations and in which the direction of translation is either from the hegemonic into the minorized language (*infra*-) or viceversa (*supra*-). For a thorough discussion on self-translation according to the unequal power relations between languages and thus its differentiation into “vertical” or “horizontal,” “endogenous” or “exogenous,” “symmetrical” or “asymmetrical,” see Grutman (2013a, 2013b).

<sup>4</sup> Octavio Paz cited in Alastair Reid (1990, p. 96).

<sup>5</sup> I would rather refer to the original text as the “primary version,” drawing upon Dasilva’s (2011, p. 63) suggestion of considering it as “the primary text.” As Anselmi (2012, p. 26) remarks, “Literary approaches to self-translation [...] do not take into sufficient account certain distinctive features that self-translation shares with ordinary translation, namely the fact that it is a mode of writing based on a pre-existing text, which is

it. Hence, we witness in such cases the rapprochement not only between translation studies, cultural studies, creative writing, and (comparative) literature but also between translation practice and theory.<sup>6</sup>

The theory of the transcultural (Dagnino, 2015; Epstein, 2009; Welsch, 1999) is a system of thought and a research method whose premise is that cultures are open and mutually transforming organisms rather than monolithic, mutually exclusive entities. Transcultural theoretical frameworks have been deployed and engaged, especially in the Latin American region, since the late 1940s, after Fernando Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” to describe the process of mutual—even if asymmetrical—cultural influences and fusions between so-called “peripheral” and colonizing cultures. The concept of transculturation has been further developed, among others and within a postcolonial framework, by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in her book *Imperial Eyes*. In the present study, I refer to the subsequent conceptualizations of “transculture” and “transculturality” developed by Epstein (2009) and Wolfgang Welsch (2009) respectively. These more recent conceptualizations of the transcultural are intended to overcome the binaries of dominant versus subordinate, colonizer versus colonized cultures inherent in the original and postcolonial interpretations of “transculturation” by focusing on the commonalities and the urge to connect that all human beings (and cultures) share, despite their intrinsic differences. As Welsch (1999, p. 201) states, “It is a matter of readjusting our inner compass: away from the concentration on the polarity of the own and the foreign to an attentiveness for what might be common and connective wherever we encounter things foreign.” In this light, the transcultural may be understood as an all-inclusive space of subjective consciousness and cultural possibilities that does not deny the formative importance of native/national cultures—and, to some extent, their accompanying worldviews—but at the same

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to be recontextualized for a new receptor-audience speaking a different language.”

<sup>6</sup> Torrop (2002) as well as Yan and Huang (2014) emphasize the role of translation meant as a medium for, and a product of, cultural exchange.

time allows an openness to the reception, integration, negotiation, and permeation of other cultures, languages, worldviews.<sup>7</sup>

Translation theory often capitalizes on juxtapositions, such as author vs. translator, original vs. translation, literal translation vs. interpretation, dominant language vs. minority language, translatability vs. untranslatability. The process of self-translation contributes to calling into question these oppositional framings. Indeed, self-translation seems to inherently work in-between these dichotomies (Hokenson and Munson, 2007) and to inhabit a transcultural space that lies beyond the divides of languages and cultures (Dagnino, 2015; Epstein, 2009). A transcultural sensitivity may thus support the view of self-translation as “a new kind of textual territory; a labyrinthine but interconnected space in which the hybridity of texts-in-translation reflects the hybrid, inter- and transcultural identities of those who produce them” (Venzo, 2016, p. 1).

### **When and Why Bilingual Writers Self-Translate**

Self-translation normally supposes bilingualism or near-bilingualism in at least one other language. As already stated, growing migratory flows have created new generations of bilingual writers (Grosjean, 2010), especially in settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States, and in former colonial powers such as France, Spain, and the UK. In this study, I draw upon the definition proposed by Grosjean (1989, p. 4), for whom bilinguals are “those people who use two or more languages in their everyday lives.” I also accept Grosjean’s (1989) distinction between a “stable bilingual” or “idiomatic bilingual” (who has reached an almost native-like competence in both languages) and a person still in the process of acquiring or restructuring a language (we might define the latter

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<sup>7</sup> As Nordin et al. remark (2016, p. 11), “Compared with concepts such as interculturality, multiculturalism, or hybridity, which all may have some relevance for describing cultural encounters, but which often presuppose the notion of cultural essentialism, the concept of transculturality has the advantage of recognising change and diversity, rather than focusing on boundaries and differences.”

as a “transitional bilingual”).<sup>8</sup> Within a literary discourse, when we speak of bilingual writers we specifically refer to “authors who compose texts in at least two different languages” (Hokenson and Munson 2007, p. 14). Neurolinguists make a further distinction between “early bilinguals” and “late bilinguals,” focusing on the age in which the individuals acquired bilingual competence; that is, they differentiate between those authors who were raised as bilinguals since their birth and those who, due to a series of circumstances happened – more or less forcefully, more or less willingly – to become bilingual either in their youth or later in life. “Early bilingualism” is defined as “coordinated” and “balanced,” since the two languages are acquired in parallel before adolescence; while “late bilingualism” is defined as “subordinated,” since L1 (Language 1) is dominant over L2 (Language 2). It has often been implied that only early bilinguals can acquire high proficiency in both languages, mainly due to the fact that there appears to be a critical age (around puberty) after which acquiring a native-like control of a second language seems much harder to obtain (see Fabbro, 1996, 2004; Paradis 2004, 2009). More recent studies, however, have shown that, depending on life circumstances, the dominance between L1 and L2 can oscillate, that a native-like proficiency in L2 can also be acquired later in life and that L2 can become the dominant language (see Birdsong, 2005, 2014; see also Salmon and Mariani, 2008). In this study, I do not differentiate the degree of bilingualism according to the stage of life in which it was acquired (the age of acquisition) but rather on the self-perceived or assumed degree of bilingual proficiency and competence in the two languages in which the self-translating author is creatively active.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the relatively new field of

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<sup>8</sup> For an exhaustive definition of bilingualism see Baker (2001) and Grosjean (2010, 1989). On bilingual or translanguaging writers see also Hokenson and Manson (2007) and Kellmann (2000, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Several terms such as *balanced bilinguals* (highly fluent in both languages), *dominant bilinguals* (dominant in one language), *passive* or *recessive bilinguals* (gradually losing competence in one of the two languages), and *semilinguals* (a questionable, pejorative term used to identify those individuals with limited level of proficiency in both first and second language) have been used to categorise bilinguals according to the self-perceived or assumed degree of proficiency they have in both languages.

bilingual writing and self-translation calls for specific approaches and valid, reliable testing models to obtain deeper insight into different levels and modalities of bilingualism. From a (neuro)linguist's point of view, in particular, further study is required on how to measure scientifically bilingual literary competence as well as on how to determine the level of bilingual proficiency necessary to accomplish a successful self-translation (but, again, "successful" according to what standards?).<sup>10</sup> This is a particularly thorny issue since, as a Recuenco Peñalver remarks (2011, p. 200), "La relación de un escritor bilingüe con su(s) lengua(s) es más compleja de lo que pudiera parecer y a menudo se encuentra presente en el propio proceso de escritura, incluso antes de que la actividad traductora intervenga."<sup>11</sup>

Irrespective of their actual qualities, self-translations are often considered superior to non-authorial translations. This is because "the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator" (Fitch, 1985). Moreover, self-translators have the authority to allow themselves alterations in the translation that an allographic translator would not deem, in principle, ethically or professionally appropriate (see already Grutman, 1998; and Landa 2006). Having said that, the presumed privileged and authoritative status of the bilingual writer as self-translator (Grutman, 2009) is marked by one of the hardest linguistic challenges: the transposition not only of a text but also of a whole cultural worldview and metaphorical space into another. As an undisclosed self-translator of poetry from Gaelic (mother tongue)

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All these categories have repeatedly been problematized, put to question and criticized by different scholars. Baetens Beardsmore (1982), for example, argues that balanced bilingualism, that is a full competence in both languages, is close to impossible to achieve, and is therefore very rare. For an overview of these terms, see Chin Ng and Wigglesworth (2007). For an extensive discussion on bilingualism, see Romaine's (1995) book *Bilingualism*, which also has a section on measuring "Degrees of bilingualism," and Baetens Beardsmore (1982).

<sup>10</sup> See, in this regard, Michael H. Daller (2011).

<sup>11</sup> "The relation of bilingual writers with their language(s) in more complex than it could seem and is often present in their writing process, even before they start translating" (my translation).

to English (second language) stated in Corinna Krause's (2007, p. 105) study, "the difficulty of translating not just the meaning of the words but the range of referents inherent within the culture is for me insurmountable." Similarly, the bilingual (English/Italian) writer Tim Parks (1999, p. 138) remarks that, "the rare bilingual person, the person most thoroughly grounded in two distinct conventions," must be "struck by the utter difference of the same text in their two languages" as a result of being "keenly aware of the distinct value structures implied by the [two] languages." These strong and unequivocal statements lead to agree with Lance Hewson (1997, p. 49) that changing languages also means changing cultures and, most often than not, meaning: "the (newly) translated text only begins to signify when it is fed into and functions within the receiving culture."

Despite the daunting difficulties inherent in self-translation, the reasons that lead writers to undertake this endeavor are manifold (economic, psychological, sociological, aesthetic, or cultural), often overlapping, and – as we shall see – often linked to migrancy or transnational lifestyles. Dissatisfaction with existing translations or the idea of challenging monolingual paradigms may encourage self-translation as much as market-related considerations, the wish to expose one's work to a culturally diversified audience, or the drive to explore new creative pathways through processes of linguistic and cultural mediation. In the course of this study I have identified at least seven main reasons or "authorial intentions" that lead writers to self-translate.<sup>12</sup> By compiling evidence drawn from other scholars' research<sup>13</sup> and from personal conversations with a selection of self-translators,<sup>14</sup> it emerges that writers may decide to self-translate in order to:

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<sup>12</sup> Oustinoff (2001, p. 278), in particular, stresses the importance of the author's intention ("*l'intention auctoriale*") during the process of self-translation and how this affects the final product.

<sup>13</sup> On the reasons that lead writers to self-translate see, in particular, Anselmi (2012), Bassnett (2006), Gentes (2016), Grutman (2015), Lagarde (2015) Nannavechia (2016) and Recuenco Peñalver (2011).

<sup>14</sup> In the last six months, I have had the opportunity to interview five bilingual authors (namely, Antonio D'Alfonso, Francesca Duranti, Sebastien Doubinsky, Francesca Marciano, and Carmen Rodriguez) on their self-translational practices.

- **Sell their book.** That is, find interested publishers in their country of adoption. This happens especially with aspiring writers and writers who are in the process of becoming bilingual (“developmental bilingual”); in this instance, they usually avail themselves of the help of one or more native speakers. I call them **“the Sellers”** and the product of their self-translation **“the sellable.”**
- **Widen their readership** (or **expose their work to a wider international market**). That is, acquire recognition – and, possibly, financial gain – in the dominant or global language. This happens especially with emerging writers or mid-career writers who are in the process of becoming bilingual (“developmental” to “transitional bilingual”), and who are keen to give their work “an afterlife” in their adopted language (Grutman, 2013, p. 71). We may call them **“the Wideners”** (or **“the Exposers”**) and the product of their self-translation **“the widened”** or **“the exposed.”**
- **Maintain a degree of “ownership,” “autonomy,” and “authoriality.”** This happens especially with mid-career writers or with writers who belong to linguistic/ethnic minorities who can be either transitional or stable bilinguals.<sup>15</sup> While some authors are particularly interested in the politics of promoting a minority language against the dominance of a major language, others confess to self-translate to “rescue” their work “from mistranslation” or to “avoid inaccuracy” (Krause, 2007, p. 110). I call this category of self-translators **“the Owners”** (or **“the Authorialists”**) and the product of their self-translation **“the owned”** (or **“the authorialised”**).
- **Reflect their bilingual identity and bi-cultural intermediation.** This happens especially with mid-career or established writers who are at least transitional bilinguals and in the process of becoming stable bilinguals. As an undisclosed subject of Krause’s (2007, p. 110) study stated, “I like seeing the same idea expressed in the other language; getting a bilingual perspective on what I’m actually trying to say [...]. I [...] like

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<sup>15</sup> See Grutman (2016b).

the challenge of making it work in the second language.”<sup>16</sup> I call them “**the Bireflectors**” (or “**the Intermediaries**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the bireflected**” (or “**the intermediated**”).

- **Majorize or decentralize a language.** A writer may decide either to give relevance to a minor language by self-translating his/her work into that language from a major one (“majorization”), or to decentralize and diminish the self-importance of two equally dominant languages by self-translating one into the other and/or vice versa (“decentralization”). Depending on the case, I call this kind of self-translators either the “Majorizers,” and the product of their self-translation “the majorized,” or the “Decentralizers,” and the product of their self-translation “the decentralized.”
- **Explore and exploit** self-translation as a creative device that enables them to rewrite, reshape, alter, or reword their originals. This happens especially with well-established writers and stable bilingual writers (in this regard, Samuel Beckett’s self-translations are most exemplary).<sup>17</sup> I call this group of self-translators “**the Explorers**” (or “**the Exploiters**”) and the product of their self-translation “**the explored**” or “**the exploited.**” It is in this latter case that writers have the unique

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the writer Andrea Chapela (2015; last paragraph) discovered in self-translation a sort of distancing device with which to critically analyze her work: “Self-translation was a great experiment and I wish to continue with it and to continue building my relationship with English. I like having to think about the words I used, the sentences I created, and the reasons behind a story that sometimes are lost in the act of writing it. It was challenging and insightful to recreate the genesis of a story, how it came to be, what the answers to questions I’d never actually asked myself might be. I grew closer to the story and to my own instincts as a writer when I was forced to take a step back and to look at them from afar.”

<sup>17</sup> Other examples come from bilingual writers in the Spanish-English combination such as Manuel Puig, Ariel Dorfman and Rosario Ferré. As Esplin (2012, p. 182) argues discussing their self-translational practices, “The task of self-translating enables these writers to tweak, readjust, or revise aspects of their texts and their literary personae. [...] Especially in the event of self-translation, authorship and textuality become evolving and collaborative endeavors.”

opportunity of carving for themselves a niche of “added creativity” by exploring (and exploiting) their privileged double status of authors and authorized agents (see Grutman, 2016b).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, this “extra” space of agency, authority, and authenticity is an alluring one. More than one bilingual author, once he/she discovers this third space of creative intervention, willingly and repeatedly goes back to it, basking in its highly demanding, but also highly rewarding web of creative possibilities. Let us just think of the often-quoted Samuel Beckett, or the South African writer André Brink, who self-translated many of his works either from Afrikaans to English or vice versa. Brink once remarked: “[...] it depends very much on the mindset and on the way that you want to approach it [self-translation], whether it is going to be disrupting or creative, whether it is going to add something to you or take something away from you” (Brink cited in Recuenco Peñalver, 2015).

This rather generic categorization of self-translators according to their aspirations, aims, and degree of self-perceived or assumed bilingualism provides us with a useful interpretive frame regarding the reasons that lead writers to self-translate and to the kind of self-translation they produce (see Table 1 for a graphic illustration of the proposed categories). However, one should keep in mind that these categories are never fixed nor impervious: they tend instead to overlap, intersect, or conflate into each other. Moreover, once they embark in the process of self-translation, writers tend to jump from one categorizing box to the other over the course of time – and, sometimes, even within the same book – depending on their publishing status, cultural manifestations, identity issues, or exploratory/creative drives. The main idea behind the proposed categorization and its related Table is to contribute to the definition of a new taxonomy for the sub-field of self-translation within a comparative transcultural paradigm. Thus, the analysis focuses on the self-translators’ intentions – as well as socio-cultural dispositions and bilingual status – in order to determine how these elements affect the final output.

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<sup>18</sup> On the place of creativity in translation theory see Hewson (2006).

**Table 1.** Categorization of self-translators and the nature of their output according to the writers' intentions and degree of self-perceived bilingualism.

Reason for Translating	Group	Output (type of self-translation)	Level of self-perceived bilingualism
Sell the book/ get the book published	the sellers	the sellable	developmental bilingual
Widen the readership/ expose the work to an international market	the wideners or the exposers	the widened or the exposed	developmental to transitional bilingual
Maintain a degree of ownership and authoriality on one's work	the maintainers or the authorialists	the owned or the authorialized	transitional to stable bilingual
Reflect one's bilingual identity or bi-cultural intermediation	the bireflectors or the intermediaries	the bireflected or the intermediated	transitional to stable bilingual
Majorize a minor language	the majorizers	the majorized	transitional to stable bilingual
Decentralize a dominant language	the decentralizers	the decentralized	transitional to stable bilingual
Explore and exploit self-translation as a creative device	the explorers or the exploiters	the explored or the exploited	stable bilingual

## Duranti and Self-Translation

In her private and creative life, the now 83-year old Italian writer Francesca Duranti has crossed many borders: culturally,

linguistically, geographically, and creatively. The only child of a wealthy family, she claims that her mother tongue is not the Italian spoken by both her parents but rather the German of the Swiss nannies she grew up with: “Il tedesco è la mia prima lingua ma non è una lingua amata; perché è proprio la lingua della separazione dai miei genitori” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017).<sup>19</sup> During her childhood Duranti also learned English and French and was often exposed to different cultural and linguistic environments: “A casa mia avevo questa *nanny* [in English; i.e. bambinaia] che era svizzera-tedesca e parlava tedesco. I miei cugini invece avevano una Miss Jesh che parlava con loro in inglese; venivano spesso a giocare nel parco a Genova ed erano in tanti; ma, soprattutto, la mia svizzera parlava un po’ d’inglese, mentre quell’altra non parlava tedesco. Per cui la lingua comune [fra di noi] era l’inglese. Quindi, inconsapevolmente, ho iniziato a impararlo. E poi è andata sempre così, insomma – l’inglese prima o poi s’impara: è nell’aria, nel vento, nelle canzoni...”<sup>20</sup>

Later on, as an adult, Duranti traveled extensively, worked as a translator (mainly from English and German into Italian) and for over 20 years spent at least half of the year in New York, often changing apartments and suburbs. This multilingual and transnational background led her to undergo what I call a “transpatriation process” (Dagnino, 2015). This process, triggered by moving physically and imaginatively outside one’s cultural homeland, allows individuals, including writers, to adopt new ways of self-identification and to develop a transcultural orientation in which “all cultures look decentered in relation to all other cultures, including one’s own” (Berry and Epstein, 1999, p. 312). As a result, Duranti was able to creatively explore her acquired transcultural disposition and re-enact it in the form of transcultural narratives

<sup>19</sup> “German is my first language but I don’t love this language; just because it is the language that [I felt] kept me apart from my parents.”

<sup>20</sup> “At home I had this Swiss-German nanny who spoke German. My cousins, instead, had a certain Ms. Jesh, who would talk to them in English; there were a lot of them and they would often come to play at the park in Genoa. But, most of all, my Swiss nanny would speak a bit of English, while their nanny couldn’t speak German. Thus the common language [among us] was English. In this way, without even knowing it, I started to learn it. And it was always like this, after all – sooner or later you get to learn English: it’s in the air, in the wind, in the songs...”

(Dagnino, 2016a, 2016b) pervaded by autobiographical references (Spagnuolo, 2017; Wilson, 2009). Although her transcultural sensibility runs through her body of work, it is mostly manifest in her eighth novel *Sogni mancini* (1996). It is the story of an Italian woman – “clearly a figuration of Duranti,” according to Rita Wilson (2009, p. 191) – who is obsessed with the idea of finding a way to get rid of fixed identities and monolingual perspectives. Duranti self-translated the book into English and published it in 2000 with the title *Left-handed Dreams*.

I interviewed Francesca Duranti on her work of self-translation in June 2017 in her Tuscan villa at the outskirts of Lucca. In our interview, Duranti confirmed that she started self-translating because she wanted the book out in English and because her editor in the US, Cecile Engel, pushed her to do so: “The publisher wanted to spare on the translation? Did she have a deep cultural purpose in mind? I don’t know. I wanted the book published [in English], and she [Cecilia, the editor] was bossy” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).<sup>21</sup> *Sogni mancini* was published in Italian in 1996, while the self-translation was published four years later, both in the US and in the UK, by two different publishers. Duranti’s UK publisher, Troubador Publishing, rightly acknowledged Duranti’s contribution as a self-translator. The frontispiece reports this note after the title: “Written and translated from the original Italian by Francesca Duranti.” (Duranti, 2000b).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Duranti’s US publisher, Delphinium Books, didn’t seem keen to advertise *Left-Handed Dreams* as a self-translation; therefore, in the para-textual material, there is no mention of it. I asked Duranti about her publisher’s reticence to promote it as a self-translation, but she was not of much help in this regard: “At the time, I did not really care about being acknowledged as the translator of my work” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).

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<sup>21</sup> Duranti made this particular statement in a private e-mail correspondence prior to our vis-à-vis interview. We conducted our interview in Italian, while in our email exchange she replied to me in English, although I had initially written to her in Italian. The author has kindly agreed to its public use.

<sup>22</sup> On visibility or invisibility of (self-)translations through the analysis of paratextual material see, in particular, Dasilva (2011).

Transparency is not always strenuously sought after by publishers nor by writers-translators.<sup>23</sup> The reasons are manifold. Recent research shows that it may be due to the perceived lesser prestige ascribed to a translated work in relation to the original work, or to the writers' wish to inscribe their name as authors (not as translators) within a more prestigious and powerful literary system (Arrula Ruiz, 2018; Grutman, 2013b). The writer Francesca Marciano has also highlighted the fact that translated books cannot compete for national literary awards and are seldom granted those government book funds so needed by publishers to cover publication costs (Dagnino and Marciano, 2017).

For her English self-translation, Duranti availed herself of the help of a dear friend, the Italian-American Arthur Coppotelli, whose task was to “de-italianize her English” (Di Ciolla McGowan 2000, p. v): “Ogni sera inviavo via fax la mia auto-traduzione ad Arthur all’altro capo di Manhattan, in modo che lui potesse controllarla. A volte mi chiamava per dirmi, ‘You just can’t say this in English!’ [in inglese]. Io rispondevo, ‘Ma è proprio quello che voglio dire!’ Poi litigavamo per un quarto d’ora e alla fine trovavamo un compromesso. In un certo senso, l’abbiamo fatta insieme [la traduzione]. Io la facevo e lui mi sgridava. E poi me l’aggiustava. *C’est la vie*. Io avevo in mente UN libro, UNA storia ed era quella che doveva venire fuori, in forma e sostanza. A volte era una faticaccia” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017).<sup>24</sup> In our interview, the author states that she did not enjoy at all the process of self-translation and that after this first attempt she was not keen on the experience nor interested in replicating it: “Self-translation happened once. That’s it” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a).

<sup>23</sup> On “transparent” (that is explicit) and “opaque” self-translations, see in particular Dasilva (2011).

<sup>24</sup> “Every evening I would fax my translated work across Manhattan to Arthur so that he could check it. He sometimes would call me back saying, ‘You just can’t say this in English!’ I’d reply, ‘But this is exactly what I want to say!’ To a certain extent we did it [the translation] together. I did it and he scolded me. And then he would fix it. Then we would argue for fifteen minutes until we would reach a compromise. *C’est la vie*. I had in mind A book, A story, and this is what would have to come out, in form and substance. At times, it was a real slog.”

Here I would like to open a little parenthesis and point out that Duranti does not consider herself a bilingual writer in the Italian-English combination. “My English is far from being fluent and proficient” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017a). Instead, she prefers to consider herself a polylingual, whose main language of reference remains Italian: “Bilingue non sono in niente. Semmai sarei polilingue, perché parlo anche il tedesco e il francese. Me la cavo parecchio bene in tutte queste lingue ma nessuna posso dire che sia una mia seconda lingua importante” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017b).<sup>25</sup> This partially explains why Duranti did not enthusiastically experience self-translation as a recreation, rewriting or a creativity enhancer but rather as a burdensome chore that needed to be carried out. In her case, there was no conscious experimentation with the translation process, as she confirmed in our interview. Indeed, in a previous interview with Helena Tanqueiro (2014, no p. n.) she had already stated: “il testo italiano a un certo punto ha cominciato a correre, mentre quello inglese (lo conosco bene, ma non è la mia prima, e neppure seconda, lingua) arrancava al seguito.”<sup>26</sup> This is an important and revealing element of Duranti’s approach to self-translation, which explains the lack of frequent and substantive differences between the two texts that could hint at a “regenerative” translation practice. In other words, it is hard to identify in Duranti’s self-translation any of those “revisional” changes usually required to re-contextualize the target text and that, according to Jung (2002, p. 49), represent “the actual decision of the author [...] to rewrite his [sic] text, rather than translate the original.”

To be precise, the main real difference between the two texts consists of the inclusion, at the end of the book (and only in the US edition), of a series of recipes that refer to the chapter titles (each chapter title corresponds to an Italian dish). Again, when

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<sup>25</sup> I’m not bilingual in anything [meaning: in any language combination]. If anything, I might be polylingual, because I also speak German and French. I get along well with all these languages but I cannot say that any of this is an important second language.”

<sup>26</sup> “The Italian text started flowing rapidly, while the English one (I know English well but it’s not my first, nor second language) trudged heavily behind.”

I asked Duranti about the inclusion of the recipes, she explained that the idea came from her editor at Delphinium: “Le ricette? È stato un capriccio della mia editrice, Cecile, che si è impuntata come un mulo. Forse, da un punto di vista commerciale, ha avuto ragione ma io avrei mille volte preferito non avercele. Tra l’altro le ho inventate a casaccio” (Dagnino and Duranti, 2017b).<sup>27</sup> Only in few instances there emerge little discrepancies (a few minor omissions and additions, the alteration of a few words) between the two texts. This leads to the inference that, more or less consciously, Duranti used the process of self-translation to translate not only her text but also her cultural self into another linguistic and cultural milieu, contesting the idea of a single, self-contained identity and embracing instead the notion of a dialectic, plurilingual, and pluricultural self. In so doing, as Spagnuolo (2017, p. 76) argues, “she [Duranti] manages to create a space where her original diversity does not disappear, but intersects with new meanings and values.”

I will provide here a few examples that show how, according to the parameters set by Oustinoff (2001), Duranti’s self-translation appears to oscillate between an “orthodox” (or equivalent) translation and a “decentred” one, that is one that incorporates elements or echoes of the source language.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “The recipes? It was a whim of my editor; she insisted obstinately about it. Perhaps, from a commercial point of view, she was right, but I would have much preferred not to include them. By the way, I made them up quite randomly” (all translations of the interview material are my own).

<sup>28</sup> Starting from the viewpoint that translating means producing a new version of the work (“traduire c’est produire une nouvelle version de l’oeuvre”), Oustinoff (2001, p. 202), differentiates between three main types of self-translation: *proprement dite* and *naturalisante* (self-translation proper, that is conventional, orthodox, standard or equivalent; also, one in which all traces of self-translation and of the source language are erased), *décentrée* (decentred, in that it incorporates reminiscences of the source language) and “*récréatrice*” (a re-creation, a re-writing, in which the author feels free to modify and transform the target text as much as s/he wants). Oustinoff also considers how self-translation often steps outside the norms of ‘translation proper’ and how writers use several different translation strategies at various periods or even within the same work. He also differentiates between ‘circumstantial’ or ‘incidental’ bilingualism and its more ‘deliberate’ and ‘sustained’ variety. Subsequently and drawing on Oustinoff (2001), Recuenco Peñalver

At one point, in *Left-Handed Dreams* the main character, Martina Satriano – an Italian woman in her forties now living and teaching in New York – watches a TV show in which the presenter Julia Child runs into serious trouble trying to prepare a *tarte Tatin* which is “a gray, runny mess [...] a sorry heap.” However, Julia does not let herself be discouraged, puts up a stiff upper lip, and just says, ‘It sometimes happens’ (Duranti 2000a, p. 116).<sup>29</sup> And Martina thus comments the scene:

<p>“Capite, questo è il mondo anglosassone, il vostro mondo. O America, America. La signora Child era dignitosa nel suo insuccesso, ma certo era dispiaciuta” (p. 137).</p>	<p><i>A rather literal translation would sound like this:</i> “You see, this is the Anglo-Saxon world, <b>your world</b>. Oh America, America. Ms. Child looked dignified [even] in facing her own fiasco, but she was certainly displeased. <i>Instead, Duranti wrote:</i> “You see, this struck me, <b>the envious Mediterranean</b>, as <b>model Anglo-Saxon behavior</b>. Oh America, America! Julia Child—although certainly annoyed—didn’t allow herself to be upset by her flop” (p. 117).</p>
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In the English text, Martina thus describes herself as “the envious Mediterranean”—envious of the solidity and optimistic attitude of the Americans. The reader, however, is induced to believe that Martina is open and ready to embrace this attitude – like the author, Martina is already in the process of incorporating another perspective into her cultural makeup. In the Italian version, instead, one feels that there is more distance between Martina and the American world. In the Italian text, there is no mention of the “envious Mediterranean”; instead, there is the recognition of a deep difference in cultural perception: the difference between the barbarism of the country she comes from (Italy) and the self-controlled civility of her adopted country (the US). Undoubtedly, in the Italian version, Martina shows a kind of “idealized” view

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(2011) has provided a further, more thorough categorization of different types of self-translation.

<sup>29</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all the excerpts from Duranti’s (2000a) *Left-Handed Dreams* are drawn from the US version by Delphinium.

of American society, which is typical of someone who looks at it from an outsider's position, not with the self-critical eye of the insider. In this regard, the following sentence is revealing:

<p>“Ma qui di regola <b>non si mente</b>, neppure in Tv [...] <b>Mente</b> ogni tanto qualche politico, ma grazie al cielo ancora oggi, dopo Nixon, la cosa continua a fare scandalo. E io? Io ero ammira- ta e commossa dalla dirittura di quella anziana signora del New England” (pp. 137–138).</p>	<p><i>The word-for-word translation would be as follows:</i> “But here normally people don’t lie, not even on TV [...] Sometimes some politicians lie, but thank God even now, after Nixon, it still causes a big scandal. And what about me? I was in awe and moved by the forthrightness of this lady from New England.”</p> <p><i>And here is Duranti’s self-translation:</i> “But in this country, normally, <b>one isn’t supposed to lie</b>. Some politicians sometimes lie, but—thank God—it still causes a big scandal, even after Nixon. <b>At least that’s what we foreigners think, and Julia Child had just confirmed it</b> [<i>this whole sentence is missing in the Italian version</i>]. And I? I was moved by the frankness of this old American lady” (pp. 117–118).</p>
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Indeed, the English version offers a slightly more complex, slightly less naive view of assumed American straightforwardness. Further on, in the English version Duranti (2000a) – or, Arthur-from-across-Manhattan – includes an extra sentence which again is meant to problematize the plain candor of the Italian text:

<p>“Quello, capite, era uno spettacolo che non avrei mai visto alla Tv <b>del mio Paese</b>. Credetemi, non esagero...” (p. 138).</p>	<p><i>The literal translation would read:</i> “That, you see, was something that I would never see on Tv in my country. Believe me, I don’t exaggerate...”</p> <p><i>Duranti’s self-translation reads:</i> “That, you see, was the kind of situation I would never have seen on Italian TV. <b>In a way it was the very reason I was living in America</b> [<i>again, this sentence is missing in the source text</i>]. I don’t exaggerate...” (p. 118).</p>
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It seems as though in the Italian version Martina still looked at the American society through the eyes of her Italian compatriots living in the peninsula; while in the English translation she had managed, like her author, to carve out for herself a more nuanced role: the role of someone who at the moment of embracing another culture acknowledges both its lights and its shadows, its positives and its negatives. In other words, it seems that, more or less consciously, Duranti took advantage of the self-translation process to project a new cultural identity of herself through a cultural repositioning of her authorial voice. At this stage, we might wonder if such cultural repositioning is due to a real growth in awareness or is instead induced, more or less consciously, by the need to be more attuned to a potential American readership that, in this case, might have found such a flattering depiction of its society too naïve. This would confirm the idea put forward by Arrula Ruiz (2017, p. 8) that, perhaps, “the role-taking of the author changes when rewriting a text to target another community of speakers, [...] aiming to attract a readership from a group or category that may be different from the initial one.”

Although her friend Cappottelli and her US and UK editors made sure that the book sounded like a real novel in English and not like a rather awkward translation by a non-native speaker,<sup>30</sup> Duranti was adamant in wanting to maintain a certain “ethnic flavor” in the translation: “I wanted to infuse my prose in English with “a scent of basil,” she reiterated in our interview.<sup>31</sup> For example, she insisted on keeping the verb “de-southernize” (a neologism), literally translating it from “demeridionalizzare” (another neologism), in regard to the process of shredding Southern accents and dialects. She also chose, against her editors’ advice, to keep the Italian word *naturalzza* in the English text; this word, which we could translate with “naturalness,” is another way of relating to the concept of *sprezzatura*, that is, the acquired (thus

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<sup>30</sup> In her introduction to the UK edition, Nicoletta Di Ciolla McGowan (2000, p. v) explains that the English version underwent “a number of revisions for over four years” before being published.

<sup>31</sup> Duranti expressed this same concept, using the same expression (“a scent of basil”), in a previous mail correspondence with Di Ciolla McGowan (2000, p. xviii).

totally unnatural) ability to behave and to accomplish even the most difficult tasks effortlessly.

In order to mirror the English spoken by Martina, who is also the first-person narrator, Duranti used certain turns of phrase, “linguistic quirks [and] neologisms [...] that she created [...] on the model of the Italian lexicon” (Di Ciolla McGowan 2000, pp. v–vi). In so doing, Duranti more or less consciously even manages to destabilize, although ever so slightly, the centrality of English as the dominant global language. By introducing in her English prose a reminiscence of her native Italian, the author shows her resolve to resist – at least to a certain extent – the pressure to “domesticate” (Venuti, 1995, 2012) her text: that is, she declines to make it conform so closely to the values, norms, and linguistic conventions of the target culture that it may seem directly written in the target language itself.<sup>32</sup> By introducing echoes of the Italian language into her English text, Duranti arguably shows her desire to disrupt the traditional dichotomy of source

<p>“Ed è certo che, se Dio vuole, questo sarà il mio ultimo sogno mancino, l’ultima volta che mi domanderò se mi trovo al di qua o al di là dello specchio, se la mano che accarezza il mio cane sia la destra o la sinistra [...] E avrò questo cane, questa vita e il resto, sia quello che sia, compreso Costantino, comprese le mie due Patrie. E ora che tutto è deciso posso finalmente aprire la porta, sento l’odore del basilico sulla finestra e sono a casa” (p. 229).</p>	<p>And one sure thing, God willing: this will be my last left-handed dream, the last time I’ll be wondering whether I am on this side or that side of the mirror, whether I’m petting my dog with my right or left hand [...] And I will have this dog, this life, and everything else, including Costantino and my two countries. And now that that’s decided, I turn the key, open the door, smell the basil on my window sill, and I’m home (p. 197).</p>
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<sup>32</sup> However, one should remind oneself that domestication techniques may be – and are – also applied to reduce the foreignness of the Other (as a bilingual author writing the source text in a foreign language) and potentially approach a new cultural version of the Self (as a self-translator working on a text for a new readership in the target language). On the role-taking and self-changing of the author during the process of self-translation see Arrula Ruiz (2017).

text vs. target text, as well as the hierarchy between languages. In this way, as Beaujour (1989, p. 112) would state, “both versions become avatars of a hypothetical total text.” In the self-translated text, the two languages are reconciled and become part of a unified meta-text, much as Martina reconciles her left-handed (the Other of her Self) with her right-handed self, finally finding unity in her transcultural home – her meta-identity.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusions

By her own admission, Duranti started off self-translating her work with the aim of selling her book to an English-speaking readership. Thus, according to the categorization that I have here proposed, she initially assumed the role of a “Seller.” However, during the translation process, she gradually moved into the group of the “Bireflectors” (or “Intermediaries”). Although in a somewhat limited and mostly instinctive way, she used self-translation as a tool – together with her transcultural creative writing – to question her identity and redefine it by negotiating two linguistic traditions and their related worldviews. Unfortunately, Duranti did not follow this initial lead and stopped in her tracks. In other words, she limited herself to one single attempt at self-translation and did not further try to explore the stylistic and creative possibilities inherent in self-translation and bilingual writing. In other words, she never showed, nor acknowledged, any deliberate penchant for or any particular interest in the creative and stylistic experimentation typical of the “Explorers.”<sup>34</sup> Apart from few exceptions as reported in the course of this chapter, Duranti’s self-translation closely follows its source text with regard to the structure of chapters (including titles), paragraphs, sentences, and word choice. In

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<sup>33</sup> In transcultural terms, a meta-identity allows to reconcile and accommodate each of the multiple articulations of being that may define and express an individual.

<sup>34</sup> Discussing the self-translational practices of bilingual writers in the Spanish-English combination such as Manuel Puig, Ariel Dorfman and Rosario Ferré, Esplin (2012, p. 182) argues that, “The task of self-translating enables these writers to tweak, readjust, or revise aspects of their texts and their literary personae. [...] Especially in the event of self-translation, authorship and textuality become evolving and collaborative endeavors.”

the target text there is no alteration of the scenes, descriptions, and dialogues presented in the source text. In Duranti's case, therefore, self-translation does not lead to the creation of another imaginary setup, with its different structure, word choice, set of poetic references, or symbolic system. One might argue that this is mainly due to the fact that Duranti did not dwell deeply and long enough in her adopted linguistic matrix to reach a stable bilingual status and thus enter a fully bilingual creative mindset. Research shows (Recuenco Peñalver, 2011) that there are self-translators who give up after their first attempt or even before completing their first self-translation endeavour. Despite their more or less accomplished bilingual status, they find the task too demanding, too time-consuming or even too confusing in terms of cultural negotiation and identity formation.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, there also are writers who experiment with self-translation as the culmination of a creative process of bilingual acquisition. Once they reach idiomatic bilingual proficiency, these self-translators feel compelled to go the extra mile and create opportunities for personal revision and reinvention as they take ownership of the linguistic and cultural ambivalences that arise from authoring two similar yet always distinct narratives. For this reason, I think we need to distinguish between self-translation as the product of a process of linguistic and cultural mediation ("the intermediated" self-translation) and self-translation as the product of a process of creative transformation (the "explored" self-translation).

Despite not being a rewriting, a rendition or a re-generation of a previously written text, Duranti's self-translation is not a standard translation either. Rather, it may be considered a – somewhat rudimentary, perhaps – "intermediated" translation. In other words, Duranti did not limit herself to reproduce in one language what she had created in another. On the contrary, working within the limitations of not fully mastering English, she strove to produce a complementary literary text with its own cultural echo and effect in the target language. That is what she admitted doing when, operating as a cultural mediator and in full transcultural

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<sup>35</sup> Arguably, other authors may also find that self-translation does not add any significant existential value to their experience as writers.

mode (Dagnino 2015, p. 158), she tried to infuse her English text with a “scent of basil.”

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