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Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*: "A self-governing literature that belongs to place"

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## Translating Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

An Interview with Italian Co-Translator Andrea Sirotti

Margherita Zanoletti Andrea Sirotti

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# Translating Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

## An Interview with Italian Co-Translator Andrea Sirotti

**Margherita Zanoletti Andrea Sirotti**

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Part 1. The context

Part 2. Practical choices and textual examples

Part 3. Reflections

Conclusion

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This article has been conceived and designed by Margherita Zanoletti, and written by Margherita Zanoletti and Andrea Sirotti. Its sections can be attributed to their authors as follows: Margherita Zanoletti authored the introduction, the questions contained in Part 1., Part 2., and Part 3., the section titled "Conclusion", and the Notes. Andrea Sirotti authored the answers contained in Part 1., Part 2., and Part 3. The English translation of Sirotti's answers is by Margherita Zanoletti.

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- 1 Born and based in Florence, Andrea Sirotti is a literary translator specialized in English and postcolonial literatures. Since the mid-1990s, he has edited and translated into Italian anthologies and poetic collections for various publishers by authors such as Emily Dickinson, Margaret Atwood, Carol Ann Duffy, Eavan Boland, Alexis Wright, and Arundhati Subramaniam. Moreover, he has translated narrative texts by Lloyd Jones, Ginu Kamani, Hisham Matar, Hari Kunzru, Aatish Taseer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Ian McGuire, introducing them to the Italian public for the first time<sup>1</sup>. With Shaul Bassi, he also co-edited the handbook *Gli studi postcoloniali. Un'introduzione*<sup>2</sup>.
- 2 In 2008, in collaboration with Gaetano Luigi Staffilano, Sirotti translated Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* into Italian, less than two years after the publication of the English original<sup>3</sup>. Published by Rizzoli, *I cacciatori di stelle* ("The Stars Catchers") never achieved the expected commercial success: in fact, it was a sales flop, and for years the Italian translation of the novel has been almost unavailable on the market.

- 3 This retrospective interview with Margherita Zanoletti was conducted in Italian via an email exchange between 2021 and 2022, and subsequently translated into English by Zanoletti. In the meanwhile, Staffilano passed away at the beginning of 2022, making the project to communicate with him too, impossible<sup>4</sup>. The conversation with Sirotti revolves around the genesis and the outcome of the project of translating *Carpentaria* into Italian, offering close micro-readings of the novel as an exemplary instance of polyphonic writing. The discussion, structured in three sections (Part 1. The context; Part 2. Practical choices and textual examples; Part 3. Reflections), touches on the difficulties and the ethical and practical choices related to the translation process, the relationship between the author and the translators, and the editorial intervention of the Italian publisher, driven by commercial reasons – from the transformation of the title and the book cover design to the attempts to normalise Wright's distinctly Indigenous Australian style. Through a series of memories and reflections looking back to an intense translation experience, and drawing on a number of relevant theorisations on translation theory and practice, including those by Antoine Berman, Lawrence Venuti, Peeter Torop, and Susan Petrilli, the interview also aims, on the one hand, to emphasise the twofold role of the author as a storyteller and spokesperson for the Indigenous minority and, on the other hand, to draw attention to the role of translators as readers, interpreters, mediators, and co-authors, offering some insights on the questionable dynamics of the publishing industry.

## Part 1. The context

**Margherita Zanoletti (MZ):** Let us start from the very beginning. What was the genesis of the project of translating *Carpentaria* into Italian?

**Andrea Sirotti (AS):** It all started towards the end of 2007, when an editor of Rizzoli (a publishing house with which I had never worked before) contacted me, asking if I would be willing to participate as a co-translator in the Italian edition of what she described as “an Australian Aboriginal novel, a nice family story set in Queensland”. The reason why more than one translator was needed lay not so much as one might imagine in the difficulty of the text, but rather in

the need to get the novel out in time for the Turin International Book Fair in May 2008. In fact, I remember that for the delivery, we would have had to respect the deadline of March 31, that is to say three months of work. Given the complexity of the novel, this was a decidedly tight time, even though there were two of us working on it, Gaetano Luigi Staffilano and myself. For various reasons, then, the publication process took longer than that, although it was not our responsibility.

I don't know why they involved me. I had already had the experience of translating so-called 'postcolonial' fiction, and this might have played a role (although my other experiences in Downunder literature were limited, at the time, to the translation of Lloyd Jones's *Mr Pip*<sup>5</sup>).

**MZ: Most translation theorists agree that before embarking upon any translation the translator should engage in a preliminary stage involving analysis and research. This translation-oriented analysis should not only ensure correct interpretation of the source, but also “provide a reliable foundation for each and every decision which the translator has to make”<sup>6</sup>. In your case, where did you start from, before translating *Carpentaria*? How long did this propaedeutical phase take?**

**AS:** As a rule, this preparatory phase should last a long time: the time necessary to become familiar with the cultural universe of the author and her story. I say *it should*, because this is not always possible. Before translating *Carpentaria*, in particular, I remember spending a few hectic days collecting as much material as possible about the author and the geographic and cultural context. The rest, alas, remained to be checked while the work progressed, especially when knowledge of specific characteristics became essential for the plausibility of the translation<sup>7</sup>.

**MZ: Notwithstanding her international reputation, in Italy Alexis Wright appears to be still a niche name in the literary market. In term of wider notoriety, she has a long way to go<sup>8</sup>. How has your Italian translation of *Carpentaria* been received?**

**AS:** A fundamental misunderstanding weighed on the reception of *Carpentaria*, I think. I always had the suspicion that Rizzoli had

acquired the book in an attempt to repeat the success of some so-called 'exotic' novels released in previous years. One example is Khaled Hosseini's popular novel *The Kite Runner*. In fact, among other things, *I cacciatori di stelle* apes the Italian title of Hosseini's book, *Il cacciatore di aquiloni* ("The Kite Hunter"<sup>9</sup>) It is obvious that a reader who is buying a book titled *I cacciatori di stelle*, with a 'nice' cover and presented to bookstores as "a family story", expects a completely different product from *Carpentaria*. This may explain, at least in part, the reasons for the novel's limited sales. I have personally had feedback from friends who bought the book expecting to find certain "ingredients", only to discover that it was instead a complex, ambitious book, and anything but easy to read<sup>10</sup>.

**MZ: Australian literature still tends to be a small market in Italy, although in the new millennium, by and large, Australian literature has increasingly been recognised and positioned as a high-quality and innovative form of creative expression, just waiting to be fully discovered<sup>11</sup>. Do you think that your translation of *Carpentaria* contributed to Wright's fame, and to the recognition of Australian Indigenous literature?**

**AS:** No, I don't. I think with regret that the Italian edition of the book has had very little impact in Italy, except perhaps in some academic circles who were ready and prepared to grasp and appreciate the scope and value of this literary work. In other words, it was a missed opportunity.

## **Part 2. Practical choices and textual examples**

**MZ: In *Carpentaria*, Alexis Wright's storytelling is a stratified blend of myth and scripture, politics, and farce. In order to compose a sort of epic of an Indigenous people who is mostly illiterate, the author combines "English and Waanyi language, high and low diction, concrete and abstract elements, humorous and poetic expression, often in alliterative prose which sounds on the verge of scansion". This way, Wright manages "to compose a wide-ranging epic novel, reminiscent of the songlines of her ancestors, but inscribed in an exogenous literary heritage in English, and written**

**in a creative, hybrid style<sup>12</sup>". This language is in stark contrast with the impoverished, colloquial English spoken by the local white community and the standard Australian English employed by the other white characters coming from different areas of the continent. What were the major challenges in translating this linguistic polyphony?**

**AS:** *Carpentaria* is a novel that merges epic and everyday life and gives voice to three distinct communities residing in Desperance: two groups of rival Aborigines (living in the Westside and Eastside barracks respectively) gathered around their respective archetypal and charismatic 'leaders' (Norm Phantom and Joseph Midnight), and the community of whites living in the neat houses of Uptown. Despite appearances, in the novel the vulgar and materialistic inhabitants of Uptown, the people without history, although living in the respectable area of town are the real fringe dwellers. Their sterile respectability, narrow materialism, and racism which are at times violent, at other times paternalistic seem to be the real 'capital sins' in that world.

Not that the Aborigines are flawless and vice-free, far from it. However, the native characters always appear to us round, in a certain sense heroic: and if they fall, they do so grandly, like the epic protagonists. When you consider the structure of the novel in its wholeness, compared to the half-figure types of the white community, Norm Phantom, Mozzie Fishman, Will Phantom, and Angel Day stand out like giants.

Clearly, trying to recreate all this in Italian is quite problematic, also because one cannot run the always present risk of making a caricature of the Aborigines by employing a language full of solecisms or anacolutha. In contrast, the language of the white community can be made to sound more colloquial in various ways, even if it is apparently closer to the standard.

**MZ:** The issue that you raise recalls Lawrence Venuti's widespread theorisation in *The Translator's Invisibility*, where distinctions such as foreignisation/domestication, indicating opposite ethical attitudes, or resistancy/fluency, indicating corresponding discursive strategies, call the attention to the 'politics' of translation, which must balance commercial and literary imperatives<sup>13</sup>. In a

**foreignising translation, as proposed by Venuti, the translator intentionally disrupts the linguistic and genre expectations of the target language to mark the otherness of the translated texts. The scholar further argues that “discontinuities at the level of syntax, diction, or discourse allow the translation to be read as a translation [...] showing where it departs from target language cultural values, domesticating a foreignizing translation by showing where it depends on them<sup>14</sup>”. However, as you observe, it is paramount to avoid the deforming tendency of exoticising and ridiculing the Foreign stressing the deviation from the morpho-syntactic standard<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, could you provide a textual example taken from *I cacciatori di stelle*?**

**AS:** As an example, let us take the incipit of Joseph Midnight's long 'tirade', contained in the sixth chapter, which recalls the arrival of the chroniclers from the southern cities to Desperance:

Every day, never miss, the white city people started to metamorphose themselves up there in Desperance, and they were asking too many questions, millions maybe, of the white neighbours. Will Phantom was that popular. A big troublemaker but nobody had a photo of him. Got nothing to give, for the white people – too insular. What they got to know? Got nothing. You could see they were city people who were too plain scared to go about, and come down there in the Pricklebush and ask the Aborigine people sitting at home in their rightful place. They looked, Oh! this side, or that side of town. No, not going, they must have said about the Pricklebush. Waiting and waiting instead. Those reporter types hung around town not knowing what to do, then they all looked outside of the fish and chip shop, and guess who? One old blackfella man, Joseph Midnight now, white hair jumping out everywhere from he head, he was sitting there. Him by himself: Uptown. He looked over his shoulder at those city newspaper people and saw they'd even got a Southern blackfella with them. A real smart one, educated, acting as a guide. He got on a tie, clean white shirt and a nice suit. He goes up to old man and called him, 'Uncle,' and he says: 'What kind of person you reckon, older man, you say Will Phantom?' Old Midnight he looked back for awhile, and he says: 'Who's this?' He was thinking now for must be two minutes before he was squinty eyes, still saying nothing, and then he speaks back, 'Well! You, you, say, I never, and I never believe it. You say I am your Uncle, then listen to this one, boy<sup>16</sup>. (Emphasis added)

Ogni giorno, immancabilmente, i bianchi di città cominciavano a *metamorfizzarsi* lassù a Desperance, e facevano troppe domande, forse milioni, ai paesani bianchi. Will Phantom era così popolare, ma nessuno aveva una foto di quel gran piantagrane. «Nulla da dare,» a bianchi come loro... che mentalità chiusa.

Cosa scoprirono? Nulla. Si vedeva che era gente di città che aveva una paura fottuta di andare in giro, di scendere nel Pricklebush a domandare alla gente *ab origine* seduta all'interno del loro legittimo posto. Guardavano, oh se guardavano! Da una parte, o dall'altra del paese. «Ma non ci andiamo» devono aver detto, intendendo nel Pricklebush. Lunghe attese, invece. Facce da cronisti che ciondolavano per la città senza sapere cosa fare. Poi guardarono tutti fuori dal negozio del *fish and chips*, e indovina un po'? Un vecchio *blackfella*, Joseph Midnight in persona, capelli che gli spuntano fuori dappertutto dalla testa *sua di lui*, era seduto là. Lui da solo: a Uptown. Guardò di sottocchi quei pennivendoli di città e vide che si erano portati dietro perfino un *blackfella* del sud. Uno intelligente, istruito, che faceva da guida. Aveva su la cravatta, una camicia bianca pulita e un bell'abito. Va dal vecchio e lo chiama «zio», poi gli fa: «*Che tipo di persona mi dici che è Will Phantom?*» Il vecchio Midnight lo squadra per un po', poi dice: «E tu chi sei?» Ci pensa per un paio di minuti, poi strizza gli occhi, ancora senza dir nulla, alla fine gli fa: «Be', tu... dici? Io non ci credo, mai e poi mai. Dici che sono tuo zio, allora ascoltami bene, ragazzo.<sup>17</sup> (Emphasis added)

In the Italian translation, one can spot examples of high and solemn language mixed with specific idiolects. We have tried to recreate this expressive modality without elements that could involuntarily sound caricatured. Indeed, what we have attempted to restore is the Aborigines' proud mastery of their own language. They make fun of anyone (white or subservient to Whites) who tries to water down or sweeten their expressions. Note, in bold, the mangled English adopted by the journalist to make himself understood better by the native elderly (“What kind of person you reckon, older man, you say Will Phantom?”).

**MZ: It should be noted that the reverse translation of “*Che tipo di persona mi dici che è Will Phantom?*” is “What kind of person do you tell me Will Phantom is?”. While the epithet “older man” has disappeared in the translation, the Italian pronoun “mi” (“to me”) is**



a strategic addition which immediately makes the sentence sound informal, almost childish. This, when combined with the anaphora of “che” mirroring the anaphora of “you”, plays a key role in transmitting the colloquial tone of the source, allowing it to be heard, though from a distance, by the receiving Italian audience<sup>18</sup>. This translation strategy contributes to preserve the polyphony of voices that characterizes Wright’s narrative, made up by a mixture of more formal language with idiomatic, colloquial expressions. Latinate vocabulary such as “metamorphose” and “insular” are emphasized by resorting to italicization (“*metamorfizzarsi*”) and punctuation (“...che mentalità chiusa”, in back translation “...what a closed mind”), while the derogative, archaic-sounding adjective “Aborigine”, also derived from Latin (“ab”, from; “origine”, *origin* (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/origin>)) is turned into the Latin expression “ab origine” (“from the beginning”).

Clearly, instead of normalizing and flattening the language, you and Staffilano have preserved and even accentuated reference to the oral speech: yet the Foreign is never ridiculed. For example, the italicized sentence “Got nothing to give” is translated literally, as “*nulla da dare*”, between inverted commas; the choice of the poetic word “*nulla*” (“nothing”, from the Latin word “*nulla*”) instead of the more prosaic synonym “niente” contributes to evoke Wright’s “distinctive poetic qualities<sup>19</sup>”. The same change of punctuation, from italics to inverted commas, occurs with “No, not going”, translated as “*ma non ci andiamo*” (literally, “but we are not going there”), a sentence which intertextually refers to Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s famous poem “We Are Going<sup>20</sup>”. In other cases, shifts occur on a lexical and syntactical level. For example, in translation the syntagm “too plain scared” turns from colloquial speech to direct expression of vulgarity, as “*avevano una paura fottuta*” means, in reverse translation, “were scared shitless”; emphasised by Wright through the use of italics, the alliteration “from he head” (a grammatical variance of “his”, where the personal pronoun “he” is employed with an adjectival function) is translated into the redundant expression “*dalla testa sua di lui*”, where “*sua*” and “*di lui*” express the same meaning (both mean “his”; in back translation: “from his head”); while the informal phrase “He got on a tie” is echoed in the Italian translation “*Aveva su la cravatta*” (literally, “He

had his tie on”), as the phrasal verb employed “*avere su*” (“to wear”, “to have on”) sounds far more colloquial than the prepositionless verb “*avere*” (“to wear”, “to have”). Similarly, spoken words that have been transcribed in the source are perpetuated in the translation. For example, “One old blackfella man” (without italics in Wright’s text, as the word “blackfella”, a variant spelling of “blackfellow”, has been lexicalised in English) is only partially translated as “un vecchio blackfella” (“an old blackfellow”). The term “blackfella” is italicised thus made more visible to the eyes of readers. While the omission does not interfere with the function of the text, the cultural reference is left on the page, leaving the reader to recover its meaning from the context.<sup>21</sup>

Reciprocated in the Italian translation, Wright’s intermingling of languages, registers and references provides an Indigenous world-view in writing. Wright sets her novel in the area around the Gulf of Carpentaria in northwest Queensland, which is the home of her people: the Waanyi. She draws not only on the dramatic topography of the region, but on an essentially non-European vision of humankind’s place in the world. Could you comment upon this aspect?

**AS:** Wright’s world is visionary and concrete at the same time. Local facts and rumours coexist with the legends of the Dreaming; ancestral myths and sacred stories are treated with a matter of fact and sometimes tragicomic tone in a very original and paradoxical language, which is sublime and quotidian, traditional, and innovative at once. This mixture certainly sounds like a rather unheard-of blend. This novel, therefore, also delights in daring linguistic research, in the continuous juxtaposition of points of view, in the occurrence of sections that can be definitely classified as ‘interior monologues’, in search of a language (especially the English used by the Indigenous protagonists) that sounds native and foreign, colloquial, and solemn, everyday and epic at the same time, with an idiosyncratic use of some ‘highbrow’ terms. It appears as if the author was particularly interested in the literary and intellectual definition of a communicative code useful for colonising the language of the colonizers by pushing it to the extreme (as in Rushdie’s famous formula “the Empire writes back<sup>22</sup>”).

**MZ: Wright's novel teems with extraordinary characters: from the rulers of the family, the queen of the rubbish-dump Angel Day and the king of time Normal Phantom, to Elias Smith, Mozzie Fishman, Bruiser, Captain Nicoli Finn, and Will Phantom. What character did you end up empathizing most with?**

**AS:** Among the characters, I remember being very impressed by Elias, the man arrived from the sea "who had his memory stolen". (C, p. 42) Despite being white, he is an outsider, one who collapses just when he compromises with the whites. His role, however, remains (some-what) central even after he dies, with Will first and then Norm caring for and talking to his mummified corpse.

**MZ: What page or episode would you pick and recall as the most moving?**

**AS:** Among the most intense pages of the novel, I would mention the episode in which Angel Day, Norm's indomitable, sensual, and individualistic wife, the one who builds the necessary and the superfluous by recycling the waste of the whites, discovers a statue of the Virgin Mary in the landfill and then repaints it in her own image and likeness, just like an ordinary woman from Pricklebush. This episode is a postcolonial reinterpretation of the religion of the oppressors:

The Virgin Mary was dressed in a white-painted gown and blue cloak. Her right hand was raised, offering a permanent blessing, while her left hand held gold-coloured rosary beads. Angel Day was breathless. 'This is mine,' she whispered, disbelieving the luck of her ordinary morning.

"This is mine," she repeated her claim loudly to the assembled seagulls waiting around the oleanders. She knew she could not leave this behind either, otherwise someone else would get it, and now she had to carry the statue home, for she knew that with the Virgin Mary in pride of place, nobody would be able to interfere with the power of the blessings it would bestow on her home. "Luck was going to change for sure, from this moment onwards," she told the seagulls, because she, Mrs Angel Day, now owned the luck of the white people. [...] This was how white people had become rich by saving up enough money, so they could look down on others, by keeping statues of their holy ones in their homes. Their spiritual ancestors would perform miracles if they saw how hard some people were praying all the time, and for this kind of devotion, reward them with money.

Blessed with the prophecy of richness, money befalls them, and that was the reason why they owned all the businesses in town.

The seagulls, lifting off all over the dump, in the mind-bending sounds they made seemed to be singing a hymn, *Glory!*

*Glory, Magnificat.* (pp. 22-23)

La Vergine aveva una veste dipinta di bianco e un mantello azzurro. Teneva la mano destra alzata in perpetua benedizione, e con la sinistra reggeva un rosario dai grani dorati. Angel Day rimase senza fiato. «È mia», sussurrò, incredula di quanta fortuna le fosse capitata in quella mattina qualunque.

«È mia», ripeté a voce alta al gruppo dei gabbiani in attesa attorno ai resti delle siepi di oleandro. Sapeva benissimo di non poter lasciare lì la statua, altrimenti l'avrebbe presa qualcun altro, e di doverla portare a casa, perché era certa che, con la Madonna a proteggere il luogo, la sua casa e la sua famiglia sarebbero state protette da benedizioni potentissime. «D'ora in avanti la sorte cambierà di sicuro,» disse ai gabbiani, perché lei, la signora Angel Day, adesso possedeva la stessa fortuna dei bianchi.

[...] I bianchi si erano arricchiti mettendo da parte abbastanza soldi da poter guardare gli altri dall'alto in basso, proprio perché tenevano in casa le statue dei loro santi. I loro progenitori spirituali avrebbero fatto miracoli ascoltando tutte quelle preghiere, e avrebbero ricompensato una simile devozione in moneta sonante. Benedetti dalla profezia della ricchezza, il denaro pioveva loro addosso ed era per questo che gestivano tutte le imprese in città.

Sembrò che i gabbiani che svolazzavano sulla discarica avessero unito le loro grida penetranti per intonare un inno: «Gloria! Gloria, Magnificat<sup>23!</sup>!»

**MZ: In this passage, as you observe, the lexicon of Christianity is translated into Indigenous knowledge. Spiritual, real, and imagined worlds coexist. Just like in the previous example, here too the Italian translators, though aiming at communicating with readers with limited awareness of Indigenous issues, avoid the temptation of domesticating the source. The excerpt features many references to the Christian spirituality, which in most cases the Italian translation renders literally. Words like “blessing” (“benedizione”), “rosary” (“rosario”), “miracles” (“miracoli”), “devotion” (“devozione”), and the Latin-injected hymn “Glory! Glory, Magnificat” (“Gloria! Gloria, Magnificat!”) are cultural borrowings from the Western**

world, which find direct correspondence in Italian. What does not have an equivalent is the Aboriginal world vision. The overlapping of past, present and future imbuing the prediction “Luck was going to change for sure, from this moment onwards” is translated into the Simple-Future sentence “D’ora in avanti la sorte cambierà di sicuro” (reverse translation is “from now on, luck will certainly change”). Clearly, Angel Day’s perspective is in striking contrast with the linear conception of time of the average Italian reader. Her viewpoint is that of an Indigenous woman, for whom “all time is intertwined, important and unresolved as Aboriginal people see the time immemorial in our culture<sup>24</sup>”, and the Italian translation cannot mimic Angel Day’s mixture of tenses, as it would sound like a mockery. In contrast, the sentence “she told the seagulls, because she, Mrs Angel Day, now owned the luck of the white people” expresses hybrid temporality in the Italian translation too: “disse ai gabbiani, perché lei, la signora Angel Day, adesso possedeva la stessa fortuna dei Bianchi” (in back translation: “she told the seagulls, because she, Mrs Angel Day, now owned the same luck as the Whites”). Notably, the capitalisation of the word “Bianchi”, introduced in the translation, appears loaded with irony, preserving Wright’s humorous tone.

As the comparative reading of source and translation suggests, the challenge for the translators is not limited to the linguistic level but includes intercultural issues, as “the source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. [ ...] Such concepts are often referred to as ‘culture-specific<sup>25</sup>’”. The translator acts as a cultural mediator, who interprets and expresses stories and themes that are limitedly known by readers outside the Australian context.

From this perspective, literary translation is always a political act. The texts that are selected to be translated ultimately shape the literary market and intercultural relations and, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggested in his discussions of dialogism and heteroglossia, the ways in which a work is translated ineluctably reflect and express an interpretation of the source and a (semio)ethical stance<sup>26</sup>. Can you suggest the main political, hermeneutical, and ethical issues raised by the process of translating *Carpentaria*?

**AS:** Translating *Carpentaria* entails ethical problems, as Wright published it as a reference text for a denied nation and their language. In a recent retrospective article for the *Guardian*, she wrote:

One of the most frequent questions authors are asked is, “Who are you writing for?” The audience I had in my mind while writing *Carpentaria* was the ancestors of our traditional country. I concentrated on the way our people speak to country and each other. In that way, it always felt as though I was writing a story to the old people about the complexities and bravery of our world today but also, by linking the past and the present in this way, I was bringing the ancestral realm into a story of all times<sup>27</sup>.

At the time, we did not know all this. We learnt it later, in the course of work. However, from the first pages of the book, Staffilano and I understood that what we had been entrusted with was an important novel, which required radical and courageous choices. At the same time, we were aware that the leeway we had was not unlimited. That is to say that we had to accept some compromises.

**MZ: How did this awareness reflect in your translation, in practical terms?**

**AS:** In our translation, I think I can say that in general we managed not to flatten Alexis Wright's style, keeping the paradoxical and mock-epic tone, and respecting the linguistic registers and the lyrical qualities. In some cases, we accepted the editorial staff's proposal to streamline the adjectives and cut down on anaphors<sup>28</sup>, but apart from this, I believe that our translation does a good service to the author and to the work.

**MZ: How did you translate the realia<sup>29</sup> featuring in *Carpentaria*?**

**AS:** Rizzoli's editorial staff invited us to have some Aboriginal terms translated or explained in the text. Called on by myself to settle the question, Alexis Wright was succinct about it. She pointed out that the Aboriginal language words and sentences in the original Australian and UK publication did not include any translation. Therefore, for consistency, in her opinion the Rizzoli publication should

have been the same. The Aboriginal language should remain in the text<sup>30</sup>.

Staffilano and I agreed upon a univocal way to translate the hydro-geo-morphological and cultural characteristics of the territory, leaving many of the most recurrent terms untranslated, such as “claypan” / “saltpan”, “bush”, “Pricklebush”, “Blackfella”, “Outback”, “Abo”. In a number of cases, we chose to leave the original word in italics and to insert an explanation in the text.

**MZ: Venuti criticises domestication as a site of racism and violence. For the scholar, domesticated translations “conform to dominant culture values”, while foreignisation or resistancy “challenges the dominant aesthetic” as new ideas, genres and cultural values are welcomed<sup>31</sup>. Did the editorial staff attempt to domesticate, or normalise Wright’s distinctly Indigenous style? Was it necessary to ‘protect’ your translation?**

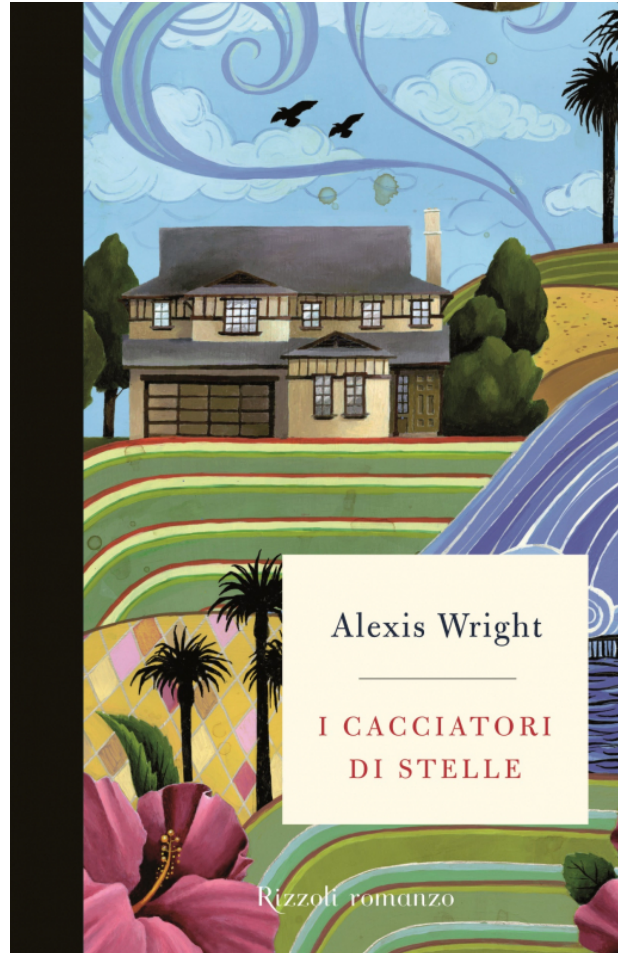
**AS:** Several times we had to hold back their attempts at standardisation and appeals to ‘accessibility’ and ‘readability’. It was not so obvious to make it clear that reading difficulties were an integral part of the stylistic choices of the author, to whom we felt we must be faithful.

**MZ: As a translator, do you employ footnotes, introductions, appendixes, glossaries to make it easier for readers? Why are these apparatuses absent in the Italian edition of *Carpentaria*<sup>32</sup>?**

**AS:** I often make use of endnotes, glossaries, and appendices to clarify some aspects of the text without the apparatuses interfering too much in the fluidity of reading. Especially when it comes to translating postcolonial poetry, inserting these paratexts seems useful and necessary to me. In the case of *Carpentaria*, however, we were told that the notes would not be included.

**MZ: Still on a paratextual level, were the transformation of the title from *Carpentaria* to *I cacciatori di stelle* and the book cover design your choices, or the publisher’s preferences? Also the typographical variations at the beginning of chapters in the 2006 edition were erased in Italian. Were these changes driven by commercial, aesthetic, or communicative reasons?**

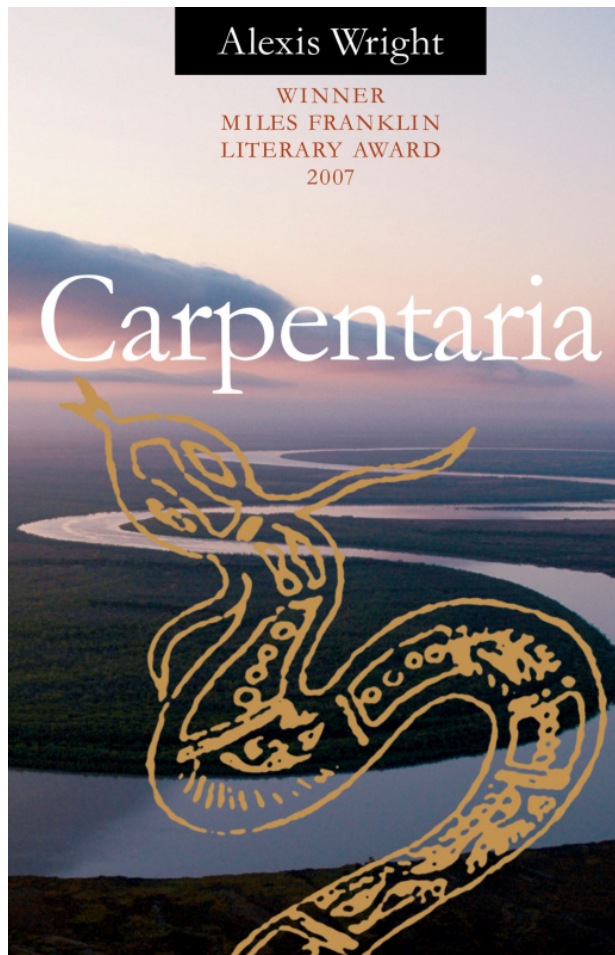
**Fig. 1.** Alexis Wright, *I cacciatori di stelle* [trans. Andrea Sirotti and G. L. Staffilano], Milan, Rizzoli, 2008. Book cover.



By kind permission of the publisher



**Fig. 2. Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, Artamon NSW, Giramondo Publishing, 2006.  
Book cover.**



By kind permission of the publisher

**AS:** None of the changes that you mention were made by the translators (in fact, this rarely happens), but by the publisher, and in particular its sales department or marketing consultants<sup>33</sup>. It would not have been particularly difficult, for instance, to reproduce the original title without changes, which by the way sounds like an Italian word! The contrast between the two covers is even more puzzling. In the Italian book an idyllic and harmonious tropical environment is depicted, while the original cover could be seen as disturbing: the ‘ancestral snake’ stands against the background of an inhospitable landscape. They seem to be two completely different, almost antithetical books<sup>34</sup>. I remember that the author, whom I was lucky enough to meet twice in the spring of 2009 during her Italian tour after the publication of the novel (first at the “Incroci di civiltà” fest-

ival, in Venice, then at Monash University in Prato), admitted that she was rather upset by the publisher's choices. As for the poetic parts all in capital letters at the beginning of the first two chapters<sup>35</sup>, we translators had respected the original intention. Evidently the final choice was not to keep them. But the reason is unclear to me.

**MZ: How did you collaborate with Staffilano, in practical terms? Did you translate together all chapters? Did one translator write the first draft and the other translator do the revision?**

**AS:** After having discussed the translation approach and the fundamental choices, we divided the chapters up and began drafting. Then, we scrupulously revised each other's work trying to harmonise the style, employing the word search function to standardise the translation of key concepts.

**MZ: In a recent interview, you declared: "In my experience, being in touch with the authors (by e-mail, Skype or, in some lucky cases, even in person) has often been fertile and enriching. As is, generally, the dialogue and exchange with the reviser appointed by the publishing house, especially if she is also a translator and therefore someone able to fully grasp the difficulties of the job and the characteristics of the style to be reproduced"<sup>36</sup>. How did this work out, in the case of *Carpentaria*?**

**AS:** I must say that deadlines were too tight for Staffilano and I to be able to have a fertile conversation with the author while the project was 'in progress'. It was only towards the conclusion that we submitted her two lists of questions. We forwarded her the first list through the editorial staff (in some cases, publishers prefer not to provide translators with the private contacts of authors, and act as an intermediary for them), while –once the urgency had been acknowledged –we sent her the second list directly. Wright was very willing to collaborate. She was happy that her work was being translated into Italian and curious to 'hear' the results. She said she was amazed that *Carpentaria* was being translated into our language. She couldn't wait to see the finished book<sup>37</sup>.

**MZ: Did you involve other people during the translation process? And which technological tools did you employ?**

**AS:** Apart from Staffilano and myself (and the editor), no other person was directly involved in the translation. It is true, however, that during the work I often consulted with my American friend and translator Johanna Bishop (I often ask the opinion of English-speaking colleagues for my translations). With her I discussed some controversial parts or some specific terms in context, to understand how they resonated with a native speaker. The first and eighth chapters, I remember, were subsequently analysed during a couple of my Master's degree classes in Postcolonial Translation at the University of Pisa. As for the technological tools, we used nothing else but some online dictionaries (including one of Australian English) and a speech synthesis software for reading. At the time, a handy open-source program called *Read please* was quite popular. Today, as we know, everything is simpler, as the text-to-speech plugin *WordTalk* is incorporated in Microsoft Word.

## Part 3. Reflections

**MZ: Translators are readers, interpreters, mediators, co-authors. What definition in your opinion best describes the act of translating?**

**AS:** On a case-by-case basis, translators can play each of these roles (and others as well). I like to think of translators above all as very attentive readers, who do research, ask themselves questions, do not give in to the superficiality or laziness of a first impression. Only in this way can the translation be based on the interpretation process that is essential to establish that relationship of understanding and empathy necessary to be faithful to the source text.

**MZ: In a past interview you observed that “translating is a way of returning home, richer, after the long journey through the text”<sup>38</sup>. How did the experience of translating *Carpentaria* enrich you? Do you think that the translator and the reader travel the same distance?**

**AS:** Whenever I lecture on translation, *Carpentaria* figures among the examples I cite more often. It is the classic case of a work, as I like to say, “translated by difference”<sup>39</sup>. Due to various circumstances two European white men, with more or less stable life habits, find them-

selves translating the work of an Indigenous woman from the other side of the world. Precisely because the differences are so marked, a lot of humility is needed. We need to listen and try to abandon as much as possible the reassuring mental framework of our everyday life and profession, which allow us to translate culturally-related works 'on autopilot'. The journey, therefore, is long and full of rewards: for both the reader and the translator. We return home enriched because we have learned to let experiences and points of view that we never even imagined existed resonate within us. This way we discover, perhaps, that these experiences and points of view are closer than we imagined to our way of feeling.

**MZ: In the Afterword of your Italian translation of Emily Dickinson's poems, you write that yours is "a translation that aspires to be the bringer of fidelity"<sup>40</sup>. In translating *Carpentaria*, what are the dominant<sup>41</sup> characteristics of Wright's poetics you have aimed to be faithful to?**

**AS:** Certainly, the literary tension of the language, its solemnity and, at times, lyricism are dominant. Many were the moments when it seemed to me to translate poetry due to the author's particular attention to aspects such as rhythm, sonority, and prosody. The stories of the protagonists are always told in a hyperbolic and "larger than life" style. A bizarre, paradoxical, extravagant, excessive, and absolutely unpredictable style. The translator must try to recreate all this and, as is evident, this sits at the antipodes (not only the geographic, but also the translation antipodes) with respect to a domesticating or normalising translation.

**MZ: In recent years, translation scholars have become increasingly interested in the role of emotion in the translation process and in how it impacts on translation performance<sup>42</sup>. In your experience, did the process of translating *Carpentaria* entail an emotional involvement? What role did your emotions play, in translating the novel?**

**AS:** It is difficult for me to answer this question many years later. Even re-reading parts of the book today, I cannot honestly recall the emotions that I felt during the reading and translation. I can say that at the time I was very much in agreement with what the Australian anthropologist Nonie Sharp had said commenting on the novel:

Why does this book move me deeply? Because it stirs up feeling on how one might live in tune with the ecology of place, the cycles of the cosmos? A parable about how, if we *don't* live in this way, nature and her beings – ‘the elements’ – make retribution? James Lovelock and other world scientists see this in their own way: as *The Revenge of Gaia*. But for them too an elemental sense of being stirs at this late moment of history. Upon this larger canvas *Carpentaria*, a work of magic realism in Westerners' language, becomes a powerful allegory for our times: the Earth's retaliation in Gaia-like fashion, responding to the deep tramping marks of our footprints on the climate, on the places of both land and water.<sup>43</sup>

This is such a relevant comment today, in the so-called “Anthropocene”, just as the novel we are talking about is relevant in many respects.

**MZ: You are not only a translator, but also an English teacher. How do these two activities connect? Have you ever employed *Carpentaria* for didactic purposes?**

**AS:** Working as a high school teacher, I have often employed the texts that I was translating in my literature or translation classes. Students get generally very curious about stories from distant and unknown places. I have frequently taken them with me on an imaginary ‘voyage’ to the India of contemporary Anglophone poets, to Chimamanda Adichie's Nigeria, Hisham Matar's Libya, or the Bougainville Island of that splendid Dickensian rewriting that is Lloyd Jones's *Mr Pip*. With *Carpentaria* I hesitated, perhaps because the English language employed by Alexis Wright is a bit too literary and complex to read without too much hermeneutic efforts at the high school level. Masters and translation schools are a different matter. At university level, Wright's novel is an almost inexhaustible source of didactic examples.

**MZ: As a final question, let us think in intersemiotic terms. What else, in your opinion, could (your translation of) *Carpentaria* be successfully translated into? A film? A musical work? A poem? A cycle of paintings? A website? A literary remake? A graphic novel? A videogame?**

**AS:** Yours are all interesting suggestions. However, the hypothesis that comes most naturally to me is the film adaptation (or perhaps a TV series) that takes its cue from the novel's narrative and protagonists. The visual and cinematic potential of the book is evident, even if, overall, *Carpentaria* is more a novel of words than images, and any adaptation that did not take this aspect into account would inevitably lead to an oversimplification.

I am also curious about the hypothesis of a musical, or perhaps a *concept*, as they once used to say, based on *Carpentaria*'s story and characters. Who knows if anyone in Australia or elsewhere has thought or is thinking about it? In fact, there is a lot of music in this novel. Classical music, Handel above all, but also the incongruous and paradoxical presence of a warbling Italian tenor (a miner) who sings "ma per fortuna è una notte di luna" ("but luckily it's a moonlit night", from Giacomo Puccini's *Bohème*) in that remote land. And country and western music: the constant soundtrack of the caravan of the religious zealot Mozzie Fishman. These genres are reinvented and made almost unrecognisable by Wright, as in this context other cultural elements are reinvented and redesigned.

## Conclusion

- 4 Since the beginning of this project, the primary goal of interviewing Sirotti has been to offer a first-hand, tangible testimony of the translator's work, accounting for the interpretive path entailed by the process of translating *Carpentaria* into Italian. Through this interactive dialogue, conducted from a distance, the translator looks back to his experience and reflects retrospectively on its political, hermeneutical, and ethical implications, allowing his work to be finally "visible". In this respect, the interview proves to be a powerful methodological tool to disclose and historicise key contextual information related to the publication of Wright's novel in Italian, which otherwise would have remained hidden.
- 5 However, an attentive reading reveals that the conversation with Sirotti goes beyond a mere recollection of a past translation experience, highlighting at least two potential new directions and approaches for translation focused research.

- 6 The first significant aspect is that, as the case study at the heart of the interview shows with particular evidence, the politics of translation must balance commercial and literary imperatives, notably in the case of works from minority and postcolonial authors such as Alexis Wright. Reconstructing these background dynamics is essential to better understand not only how and why a translation was published, but also how and why a literary work, especially if belonging to a 'minor' literature, is accepted within and connects with a receiving cultural system<sup>44</sup>.
- 7 This issue clearly emerges when considering the contrast between the translation approach of the publisher and that of the translators. On the one hand, Rizzoli's requests towards a translation as "domesticated" as possible, devoid of footnotes, translators' notes, and other critical apparatuses that would make the translators' work more evident, as well as the transformation of the original title *Carpentaria*, perhaps considered too cryptic, into the more "marketable" *I cacciatori di stelle*, can be seen as commercial strategies to present Wright's work to potential readers as a political-free, pleasant to read, and exotic novel. The tight deadline allowed for completing such a complex task as translating *Carpentaria* into Italian, imposed by the publisher, was also dictated by commercial needs. On the other hand, Sirotti and Staffilano's foreignising translation move in an entirely different direction. As the micro-readings offered in the interview display, although the translators admittedly had to "accept some compromises", they did not conform to the readers' expectations simplifying Wright's stratified language, but rather preserved the stylistic uniqueness of the original as much as possible. Their attempt was to mediate between their tendency towards 'resistive' translation and the need of the publisher for fluency and stylistic standardisation. This approach, which goes against the current mainstream of Italy's publishing market<sup>45</sup>, reflects their ethical intent to let the Foreign shine through, allowing the reader access to a multidimensional story made of a polyphony of voices.
- 8 Observing these dynamics, we can gain a deeper understanding of why until now the Italian market has not been able to fully appreciate *I cacciatori di stelle*. As it is translated, the novel represents neither of the two "extremes" that so far have found the favor of the Italian

public: the “exotic”, namely, what is seen abroad as “Australian” in stereotypical terms (for instance, novels set in Australia, Australian blockbusters, etc.), and the “domesticated”, namely, what is easy to sell (for example, genre fiction <sup>46</sup>).

- 9 A second relevant point that the interview raises is that any literary translation, including the translation of a “minor” literary work, always moves also on a multimodal and intersemiotic level. In other words, in order to achieve a thorough assessment of a translated work, analysing the linguistic aspects only is not enough. Rather, it is paramount to go beyond a verbocentric approach and consider the material and nonverbal elements too <sup>47</sup>. While, for instance, within translation studies, only a few writings in English deal mainly or exclusively with covers of translations <sup>48</sup>, the book cover, the page layout, the choice of paper, and the typographical elements should be all considered as aspects which jointly contribute towards a “resistant” or a “domesticated” translation. For example, the paratextual transformations introduced by the publisher Rizzoli, and in particular the makeover of the original book cover into a different design, cannot be considered as a merely accessorial element but an integral part of a multimedial translation process. As a matter of fact, the resemiotisation of the original cover illustration into a ‘pleasant’ landscape design ends up communicating to potential readers an idea of *Carpentaria* which does not entirely reflect the literary features of Wright’s work.
- 10 Considering these two aspects, the Italian translation of *Carpentaria* stands out as an exemplary case of “minor literature” in translation, where the interconnected roles of translators, authors, editors, designers, and publishers still wait to be fully acknowledged and investigated. In this respect, interviewing Sirotti has programmatically aimed, on the one hand, to contribute to make the translators’ work more visible, “inviting a critical appreciation of its cultural political function and a reexamination of the inferior status it is currently assigned in law, in publishing, in education <sup>49</sup>”, and on the other hand, to stimulate further reflection upon current understandings of ‘visibility’ across translation theory and practice.



1 Amongst Sirotti's latest translations, we recall here: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Turin, Einaudi, 2014; *Cara Ijeawele: quindici consigli per crescere una bambina femminista* and *Quella cosa intorno al collo* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Turin, Einaudi, 2017; *Il pericolo di un'unica storia* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Turin, Einaudi, 2020; Arundhati Subramaniam, *A una poesia non ancora nata* [trans. and ed. Andrea Sirotti], Latiano (BR), Interno poesia, 2018; Ambarish Satwik, *Il basso ventre dell'impero* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Milan, Metropoli d'Asia, 2010; Aatish Taseer, *Straniero alla mia storia: viaggio di un figlio nelle terre dell'islam* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Turin, Einaudi, 2010; Shazia Omar, *Come un diamante nel cielo* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Milan, Metropoli d'Asia, 2009.

2 Shaul Bassi & Andrea Sirotti, *Gli studi postcoloniali: Un'introduzione*, Florence, Le Lettere, 2010.

3 Alexis Wright, *I cacciatori di stelle* [trans. Andrea Sirotti and G. L. Staffilano], Milan, Rizzoli, 2008. Eleonora Federici provides an insightful critique of Sirotti and Staffilano's translation in her essay titled "Translating Counter-Memory in Australian Aboriginal Texts", in Sharon Deane-Cox & Anneleen Spiessens (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Memory*, London, Routledge, 2022, pp. 266-281, pp. 275-278.

4 Active as a literary translator since 1987, Gaetano Luigi Staffilano (1943-2022) gained his popularity for his translations of science-fiction and heroic fantasy books. Among the authors that he translated from English into Italian are Dan Simmons, Isaac Asimov, Robert Ervin Howard, and Terry Brooks.

5 Lloyd Jones, *Mister Pip* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Turin, Giulio Einaudi, 2007.

6 Christiane Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005, p. 1. See also *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, London and New York, Routledge, 2018.

7 Sirotti recalls what in Nord's methodology is referred to as "cultural translation problems", which arise from shifts in register, from the presence of culture-bound terms, and from differences in terms of text-genre conventions. See Christiane Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

- 8 To this date, *Carpentaria* is the only book by Alexis Wright that is available in Italian. The Italian translation of a lecture by Wright, originally titled “In times like these, what would Oodgeroo do?” is included in *Oodgeroo Noonuccal, My People: La mia gente* [ed. Margherita Zanoletti], Milan, Mimesis, 2021, pp. 11-29.
- 9 *The Kite Runner* is the first novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini (New York, Riverhead, 2003). Isabella Vaj translated Hosseini's book into Italian as *Il cacciatore di aquiloni* (Milan, Piemme, 2004).
- 10 In his pioneering study of the covers of translated books (“Judging a Translation by Its Cover”, *The Translator*, vol. 24, n° 1, 2018, pp. 1-16), Brian Mossop seems to agree with Sirotti's viewpoint, when he observes that “in a bookstore, only a few people will read enough of the main text to determine whether the promise of the cover will be fulfilled” (p. 11). The cover of *Carpentaria* and that of *I cacciatori di stelle* are reproduced in Part 2 of this paper (fig. 1 and fig. 2).
- 11 On the diffusion of Australian translated literature in Italy from 2000-2021, see Part 2 (by Zanoletti) of Francesca Di Blasio & Margherita Zanoletti, “Australian Studies and the Reception of Australian Literature and Culture in Italy: A Survey”, in Maria Dolores Ramírez Almazán (ed.), *Encrucijadas en la cultura italiana*, Madrid, Dykinson, 2022, pp. 47-63, pp. 53-59.
- 12 Françoise Palleau-Papin, “Wright's Poetic Prose Epic”, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 44, n° 2, 2022, DOI: [10.4000/ces.10481](https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.10481) (<https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.10481>).
- 13 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, Routledge, 1995.
- 14 Lawrence Venuti, “Translation as Cultural Politics: Régimes of Domestication in English”, in Mona Baker (ed.), *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 65-79, p. 75.
- 15 On this topic, see Antoine Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 276-289; Franca Cavagnoli, “Translation and Creation in a Postcolonial Context”, in Simona Bertacco (ed.), *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures*, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, pp. 165-179; “Errare, sviarsi, vagabondare lungo il sentiero della traduzione letteraria”, *Altre Modernità*, n° 4, 2017, pp. 176-189, p. 178.

- 16 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, London, Constable, 2009, p. 153. Further references to the novel will appear as page numbers between brackets in the body of the text.
- 17 Alexis Wright, *I cacciatori di stelle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.
- 18 Eleonora Federici, "Translating Counter-Memory in Australian Aboriginal Texts", *op. cit.*, p. 277.
- 19 Françoise Palleau-Papin, "Wright's Poetic Prose Epic", *op. cit.*
- 20 "We Are Going" by Oodgeroo Noonuccal is a powerful poem about the struggles of Aboriginal Australians in the face of British colonialism. Alexis Wright cites this lyric in her lecture "In Times Like These, What Would Oodgeroo Do?", *op. cit.* p. 14.
- 21 As Federici observes ("Translating Counter-Memory in Australian Aboriginal Texts", *op. cit.*, p. 274), "non-translation comes into play where the italicized presentation of racist, derogatory terms in the source text, such as 'blackfella', 'boong', 'gombo' reappear in the translation. This signal both the translator's awareness of the significance of the terms to the interpretation of the text and the difficulties of balancing the weight of the words with the needs of the reader".
- 22 Sirotti's reference goes to Salman Rushdie's article "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" (*The Times*, 3 July 1982, p. 8), which discusses the ways postcolonial voices respond to the literary canon ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary\\_canon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_canon)) of the colonial centre. Rushdie's article has given the title to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's renowned book on postcolonialism *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989).
- 23 Alexis Wright, *I cacciatori di stelle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.
- 24 Alexis Wright, "The Inward Migration in Apocalyptic Times", *Emergence Magazine*, n° 27, January 2021, <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-inward-migration-in-apocalyptic-times/>.
- 25 Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 21.
- 26 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist (ed.), Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981. See also Susan Petrilli, "Translation and Semiosis. Introduction", in Susan Petrilli (ed.), *Translation*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2003, pp. 17-37; "Semioethics and Literary Writing:

Between Peirce and Bakhtin”, *Language and Semiotic Studies*, vol. 3, n° 1, 2017, pp. 12-29; Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 274-299.

27 Alexis Wright, “The Big Book About Small Town Australia that Travelled the World”, *The Guardian*, 7 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/sep/08/the-big-book-about-small-town-australia-that-travelled-the-world>.

28 Here Sirotti's reference is to the anaphor in grammar, rather than to literary anaphora.

29 In translation studies, *realia* (from Latin language, “real things”) are words and compound phrases whose referents are lexical gaps in all the other languages, because their original referent exists only in one country. See Peeter Torop, *La traduzione totale*, Milan, Hoepli, 2010, p. 226.

30 Alexis Wright, private correspondence with Andrea Sirotti, 28 April 2008.

31 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-22.

32 See Eleonora Federici, “Translating Counter-Memory in Australian Aboriginal Texts”, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

33 Mossop (“Judging a Translation by Its Cover”, *op. cit.*, p. 11) suggests that in some cases translators contribute to the book cover design, although in an indirect way: “translators do sometimes provide a summary translation or an even shorter gist translation of a text in another language. Thus if a book cover can be said to convey the ‘gist’ of the accompanying text, it would seem to count as a translation.”

34

The book cover of the 2006 edition was designed by award-winning Australian designer Harry Williamson; the image appearing on the cover of the Italian edition is by Gina Triplett and Matt Curtius, while the design project is by Francesca Leoneschi.

While in the interview Sirotti criticises the difference between the book cover of the original edition of *Carpentaria* and the cover of *I cacciatori di stelle*, Federici (“Translating Counter-Memory in Australian Aboriginal Texts”, *op. cit.*, p. 277) claims that *Carpentaria* and its Italian edition are rather similar in the choice of book cover, whilst she points out other paratextual differences: “both present a background landscape with palms and flowers. Yet, while the original title indicates the geographical position of the story – the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Queensland, between the

Northern Territory and Cape York Peninsula – the Italian title *I cacciatori di stelle* refers to the story's protagonists. In terms of page layout, the different font used for the beginning of each chapter has been maintained in the Italian translation (though it changed from capitals to italics) and the terms or sentences in italics scattered throughout the text are also present.”

35 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, 2008, *op. cit.* pp. 1, 11; *I cacciatori di stelle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 23.

36 “Nella mia esperienza, il confronto con gli autori (per e-mail, Skype o, in alcuni casi fortunati, anche di persona) è stato spesso molto fertile e arricchente. Così come lo è, generalmente, il confronto e lo scambio con il revisore incaricato dalla casa editrice, soprattutto se è anche traduttore e quindi in grado di cogliere appieno le difficoltà del lavoro e le caratteristiche dello stile da riprodurre.” Intervista ad Andrea Sirotti, traduttore di letteratura postcoloniale, Tradurre per l'editoria, 20 April 2014, <https://lamatitablu.com/2014/04/30/intervista-ad-andrea-sirotti-traduttore-di-letteratura-postcoloniale/>.

37 Alexis Wright, private correspondence with Andrea Sirotti, 18 March 2008.

38 “Tradurre è un modo di tornare a casa, più ricchi, dopo il lungo viaggio nel testo.” In: Elisabetta Favale, “La mia lettera al mondo di Emily Dickinson. Intervista al traduttore Andrea Sirotti”, *Linkiesta*, 24 November 2019, <https://www.linkiesta.it/blog/2019/11/la-mia-lettera-al-mondo-di-emily-dickinson-intervista-al-traduttore-an/>.

39 The original expression “tradotta per differenza” sounds like a pun. In Italian language, the closest syntagm to this expression is “per sottrazione”, that is, “by subtracting”. The wordplay relies on the word “differenza”: as a matter of fact, “difference” can refer both to the result of an arithmetic operation of subtraction, and to the process or set of properties by which one entity is distinguished from another.

40 “Una traduzione che aspira a farsi portatrice di una fedeltà”. Elisabetta Favale, “La mia lettera al mondo di Emily Dickinson”, *op. cit.* The volume cited is Emily Dickinson, *La mia lettera al mondo* [trans. Andrea Sirotti], Latiano (BR), Interno Poesia, 2019.

41 Here we refer to Roman Jakobson's seminal definition of dominant as “the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.” Quoted in Peeter Torop, “Translation as Commu-

nication and Auto-Communication”, *Sign System Studies*, vol. 36, n° 2, 2008, pp. 375-397, pp. 381-382.

42 Séverine Hubscher-Davidson, *Translation and Emotion: A Psychological Perspective*, New York and London, Routledge, 2018; Caroline Lehr, “Translation, Emotion and Cognition”, in Fabio Alves & Arnt Lykke Jakobsen (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Cognition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 294-309; Susan Petrilli & Christine Ji (eds.), *Exploring the Translatability of Emotions: Cross-Cultural and Transdisciplinary Encounters*, Cham, Palgrave, 2022; *Intersemiotic Perspectives on Emotions: Translating across Signs, Bodies and Values*, London and New York, Routledge, 2022.

43 Nonie Sharp, “Review of *Carpentaria*”, *Island*, n° 111, 2007, pp. 61-62.

44 In this context, the term “minor” is borrowed Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose concept of “minor literature” can also be associated with the phenomenon of Australian Indigenous literature. According to conceptualization of the French critics, the three characteristics of a “minor” literature (or art) are the deterritorialisation of language, the political content and collective enunciation. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* [transl. Dana Polan], Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1986, pp. 16-17. See also Venuti’s “Introduction”, in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Translation and Minority*, special issue of *The Translator*, vol. 4, n° 2, 1998, pp. 135-144.

45 “In Italy, too, the main concern is often that the prose be void of lexical ambiguity, and that morphology and syntax be orderly and proper. When translating the text of the Other into one’s own language, instead of receiving the foreign elements of the other culture and the possible deviations from the standard language, the text’s distinctive marks, the stylistic peculiarities, one tends to manipulate the text, repressing innovation [...] and making the Other similar to the self”. Franca Cavagnoli, “Translation and Creation in a Postcolonial Context”, *op. cit.*

46 Francesca Di Blasio, Margherita Zanoletti, “Australian Studies and the Reception of Australian Literature and Culture in Italy”, Part 2, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

47 Susan Petrilli & Margherita Zanoletti, “Intersemiotic Approaches to Translation”, in Kobus Marais, Reine Meylaerts (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Translation Theory and Concepts*, London, Routledge, 2022, forthcoming.

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### English

In 2008, the literary translator Andrea Sirotti co-translated with Gaetano Luigi Staffilano Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* into Italian, less than two years after the publication of the original. The translation introduced Wright to the Italian public for the first time. However, *I cacciatori di stelle* ("The Stars Catchers") never achieved the expected commercial success: in fact, it was a sales flop, and for years the Italian translation of the novel, published by Rizzoli, has been almost unavailable on the market.

This interview with Margherita Zanoletti revolves around the genesis and the outcome of the project of translating *Carpentaria* into Italian, offering close micro-readings of the novel as an exemplary instance of polyphonic writing. The discussion touches on the ethical and practical choices related to the translation process, the relationship between the author and the translators, and the editorial intervention of the publisher – from the transformation of the title and the book cover design to the attempts to normalize Wright's distinctly Indigenous Australian style. The interview also aims to emphasise on the one hand, the twofold role of the author as a storyteller and spokesperson for the Indigenous minority and, on the other hand, the role of the translators as readers, interpreters, mediators, and co-authors.

### Français

En 2008, le traducteur littéraire Andrea Sirotti a traduit, en collaboration avec Gaetano Luigi Staffilano, le roman de Alexis Wright *Carpentaria* en italien, moins de deux ans après la publication de l'édition originale. La traduction a introduit Wright au public italien pour la première fois. Cependant, *I cacciatori di stelle* ("Les chasseurs d'étoiles") n'a jamais atteint le succès commercial attendu : en effet, les ventes ont été un échec et pendant des années la traduction italienne du roman, publiée par Rizzoli, a été presque introuvable sur le marché.

L'interview de Margherita Zanoletti tourne autour du projet de traduction de *Carpentaria* en italien, son origine et son résultat, en portant une attention particulière au roman comme exemple d'écriture polyphonique. La discussion porte également sur les choix éthiques et pratiques liés au processus de traduction, sur la relation entre auteur et traducteurs, et sur l'intervention de l'éditeur, de la transformation du titre du livre et du design de sa couverture jusqu'aux tentatives de normaliser l'écriture aborigène australienne de Wright. Le but de l'interview est aussi d'accentuer d'un côté le double rôle de l'auteur en tant que narrateur et porte-parole de la minorité indigène et, de l'autre côté, de souligner le rôle des traducteurs comme lecteurs, interprètes, médiateurs et co-auteurs.

**Mots-clés**

traductologie, traduction littéraire, entretien rétrospectif, analyse textuelle, *Carpentaria*, Wright (Alexis), littérature australienne, Premières nations, traduction italienne, traduction interlinguale

**Keywords**

translation studies, literary translation, retrospective interview, textual analysis, *Carpentaria*, Wright (Alexis), Australian literature, First Nations, Italian translation, interlingual translation

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**Andrea Sirotti**