WHEN WORDS GO BEYOND WORDS:
NOTES ON A HERMENEUTICAL AND SENSUALISTIC APPROACH TO TEXT AND TRANSLATION IN THE POEMS OF KEZILAHABI AND LEOPARDI

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In this paper, I propose translation as a main tool for a sensualistic and hermeneutical approach to texts. In agreement with the writer and thinker Euphrase Kezilahabi, who claims that the text has to be considered as a living event, I propose to look at a text not as an object but as a living body. I ague that this approach reduces the distance between the body of the text and that of the reader. Perception can thus be used as a means to know and critique a literary text. I present a multifocal sensualistic analysis based on an analogical idea of knowledge, taking translation as a tool to push the critic to focus on the text word for word (not excluding the paratext or the context). The translations discussed here are poems by Kezilahabi and a proposal for a Swahili translation of the poem *L'infinito* by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi.

Introduction

During the 2017 Swahili Colloquium in Bayreuth, the Swahili writer and scholar Said Ahmed Mohamed gave a brief talk in which he argued that Swahili literary scholarship lags behind linguistic research because literary scholars tend to privilege the analysis of circumscribed literary elements rather than analyse the text as a whole. His comment echoes two other renowned Swahili writers and scholars: Euphrase Kezilahabi and Ebrahim Hussein. They both emphasise the capacity of literature to resonate in the body of the reader, making the perception of a text a primary factor of analysis. They both emphasise the need to treat texts holistically. When we read a text silently or aloud, we hear it through our voice or someone else's voice and we perceive it as a whole, with all its components of structure, sound and content. In an interview I conducted with Kezilahabi in July 2015, he contended that literature, like other arts, has the ability to show truth, and this truth is always open: "The truth of art sinks in the human thought and explains more. It is across time: past, present and future. These three times are *sasa* [now]. In this time literature is possible. For this same reason literature has no end, doesn't grow old and doesn't go off." Thus, for Kezilahabi, literature is always an event that is happening in the here and now. In his PhD thesis entitled *African Philosophy and the Problem of Literary Interpretation*, he argues that literature is not a representation of something (1985: 228) but an "event lived" (1985: 221). Literature as an event has the power to emerge in the body of the reader and to provoke a revolution of human faculties – for example, a revaluation of understanding or knowing, which Kezilahabi expresses both in his academic work (1985: 217-218) and in his poetry (1988: 25). Kezilahabi sees understanding as having a direct relation with nature and with the body (1985: 241). If we want to approach literature as an "event lived",

without objectification and without pretending that it is a representation or description of something, then we must approach the text's body.

In recent decades, extra-textual (postcolonial and cultural) approaches have dominated literary studies, especially within African Studies. These approaches see the text and its material as a direct reflection of its context (often of imperialism, but without dialectics) and tend to neglect the aesthetic core of literary works. This is what pushed me to return to prioritising the text in my literary practice. In this paper I am going to argue in favour of the necessity for scholars of literatures to focus their analysis on the text, as Emil Staiger, Richard Alewyn and Wolfgang Kayser did with their *werkimmanente Interpretation* ('immanent interpretation of texts'). I was particularly inspired by Kayser, who, after World War II, wanted to overcome the perception that all German art, literature and philosophy (at least from the 19th century onwards) was a preparation for the Shoah. At the beginning of his essay *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk* ('The linguistic work of art', 1948), he laments that much contemporary research focused on extra-poetic phenomena, establishing a one-to-one relation of refraction between the artistic work and reality (1978: 5). Kayser proposed to re-adjust the focus of literary research on texts and to interpret literature as closed linguistic system. He argued that critics try to lock up literature itself, focusing on extra-textual elements, for example, on the poet or his worldview, a literary movement or generation, a social group, a landscape, the spirit of an epoch or the character of a population.

The question arises if such readings neglect or forget the essence of the artistic linguistic work itself. In my view, a poetic work is a closed linguistic system. Therefore, the most urgent task of literary research is the determination of the creative linguistic forces, the comprehension of their interaction through the wholeness of the text in order to interpret it. Kayser insists on the need to come back to the text and consider it as a linguistic work of art. These two elements constitute the core of literature: language and aesthetics. However, I find the idea of literature as a closed system (Kayser 1978: 5) problematic. This suggests a sort of transcended perfection and conclusiveness that art does not have and does not need. In fact, according to the anthropologist Karin Barber, a text can tell us something about its cultural provenance as long as it is treated as text *qua* text: "If a verbal text is to 'tell us' anything about a society, social experience, or cultural values, this can only be *through* its specific textuality, its specific way of being a text – not by by-passing it" (Barber 2007: 13). Thus, a text is not a closed product that has no connection with culture and society. Barber (2007: 5), in fact, argues that a text has a socio-historical context, a "textual tradition":[1]

> Texts, very often, reflect upon themselves. In this way they offer a unique insight into their own operations as acts of cultural instauration. […] They are set up to be interpreted: as a challenge, a puzzle or a demand. And the means to interpret them

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[1] I use the term "textual context" (Gaudioso 2017: 5), which seems to me more appropriate for a literary study than "textual tradition" because the idea of tradition presumes something accepted by a community, an idea that may be useful in anthropology. But if we want to focus on a single text, we cannot deny that other texts may also have been involved in the formation of the text that we are analysing or in the experience of its author, but not in its tradition.

> – the repertoires of arguments, analyses, explanations, expansions and intertextual linkages – are themselves a tradition, and one that can be just as important and revealing as the textual tradition itself, with which it is symbiotically linked. The exegesis is part of the process by which the text is established; and because it is explicitly analytical and interpretative, it has the capacity to reveal something of the inner processes of instauration.

Barber, therefore, claims that texts reflect upon themselves, while excluding a one-to-one relation between society and literature. Quoting Jacques Derrida, Barber argues that there is nothing outside the text and that its significance resides in the way it is set up as a text (Barber 2007: 14-18) – in other words, its aesthetics. Building on this, and believing that literature is not a mirror of society, Barber argues that a text can reveal something about society only if it is treated and investigated in its textuality, in its being a text. Barber also places emphasis on the comparative angle of literary research by claiming that the texts are "symbiotically linked" with "repertoires of arguments, analyses, explanations, expansions and intertextual linkages" and that studying this connection can "reveal something of inner processes of instauration" (*Ibid.*: 5). Barber's essay on the anthropology of texts challenges literary critics by focusing on the setting up of the text (hence the importance of close reading and aesthetics of the text), on intertextual linkages (thus on comparative analysis) and on exegesis of the text (thus on hermeneutics, aesthetic reception and the reader). Indeed, Barber criticises the tendency, particularly among literary scholars in African studies, to favour extra-textual approaches.

Elsewhere (Gaudioso 2017), I have proposed looking at translation as a governing principle in knowing and analysing a text. This principle involves different pragmatic processes, such as reading (and feeling), analysing (instead of an analytic method, I propose an analogical one, like comparison) and creating an analogue text (the act of writing the translation of a text). Following this approach, translation can be a method capable of overcoming the deficit in Swahili literary criticism that Kezilahabi and Mohamed spoke of. The aim of this method is to treat the text as text, namely in its wholeness. The empirical experience of translating allows us to deal with the text as a whole and can involve the following approaches: reading aloud, performing, analogical thought in literary language, repertoires and aesthetics.

In what follows, I will first introduce and explain the hermeneutic and sensualistic[2] approach to translation. I will then present two examples of my translations, one from Swahili into Italian

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[2] I am not sure about the use of the English term sensualism. In Italian there are two different terms, *sensismo* and *sensualismo*. The first term refers to a philosophy of the senses, of perception, which is not a dominant strand in the history of philosophy: there are ancient examples like Protagoras, but we have to wait until the modern era for the appearance of this strand with the Italians Telesio (1509-1588) and Campanella (1568-1639). The second term, *sensualismo*, is a theory based on satisfaction of the senses. Drewal (2005: 6) proposes the use of the term "sensiotics"; there are also other possible terms like "sensory" and "somatic". Even if sensory and sensiotics are semantically more or less adequate and even if somatic is tempting and better shows a holistic conception of being and body (which is particularly what I intend in this work), sensualistic is used, as far as I know, for the above-mentioned philosophy, which is precisely the philosophy that Leopardi studied in his father's library. Hence, I prefer here to use the term sensualistic, which is suitable for both literary aesthetics or criticisms and for philosophy.

(my mother tongue) and the other from Italian into Swahili, to illustrate the application of such an approach.

Senses and hermeneutics

Kezilahabi (1985: 228-229) rejects a notion of literature as a representation of something else, or, to use his words, as an "archaeology of knowledge" (*Ibid.*: 221). In rejecting the objectification of texts, Kezilahabi chooses understanding rather than knowing as an approach to texts (Kezilahabi 1985: 228-229).[3] He defends literature as a living event that can stimulate the public through the dormant human faculties (see Gaudioso 2015, 2017), and he endows literature with the capability to emerge in the body of a reader or to be constituted through events lived by the author:

> A competent poet will try to use all these tools to make the reader see the picture of the things which are being said inside [his poetry]; he can excite the body or make the reader smell the blood of a goat (for example).[4] (Kezilahabi 1976: 121)

The Italian scholar Gabriele Frasca (2005: 38) similarly emphasises the relation of texts with the body. According to him, language and writing are prostheses and, as such, they must join (even if extroverted and fading) with the aid of pain (which is the most powerful aid of mnemonics) to enter into the flesh. In Frasca's view, this is the output of literature as an art of words. The Swahili writer Ebrahim Hussein also underlines the processual aspect of literature and its vitality, which he calls *operesheni* ('operation'):

> To understand, to follow and to respect this operation, to contemplate the play of sound and meaning in a text means to give life to literature. It is clear that meaning comes from sound and goes back to the sound. [...] That circle is alive in literature. In science, there is an operation and a different interpretation of what is alive and what is dead. An understanding different of that operation involves the understanding of the necessary relationship between literature and science. Understanding this relationship means rejecting that literature is an explanation of a scientific concept.[5] (Hussein 1988: iii)

Comprehending this process means giving life to literature. Like Kezilahabi's, Hussein's conception of literature is focused on its vitality and its acting on the reader or audience. Hussein describes the mechanism of the text as a refraction of meaning between features of

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[3] For Kezilahabi, understanding and knowing are two different human faculties (Kezilahabi 1985, interview 2015, see Gaudioso 2017): understanding is based on experience through a sensorial approach, which makes knowledge relational and living; knowledge is based on communication, it is not directly experiential knowledge (like knowledge from books). This difference is similar to the Yoruba concepts imo and igbagbo, the first being associated with perception and experiential knowledge, the second with indirect knowledge, something that we receive or agree to, like education or beliefs (Hallen 2004: 298).

[4] The Swahili original is as follows: "Mshairi mashuhuri atajaribu kutumia vyombo hivi vyote ili aweze kumfanya msomaji aone picha ya mambo yanayozungumziwa mwake; anaweza kusisimua mwili au hata kumfanya msomaji asikie harufu ya damu au beberu (kwa mfano)."

[5] The Swahili original is as follows: "Kuielewa, kuifuata na kuiheshimu operesheni hii, kutaamuli juu ya matamshi na juu ya fikira ni kuiweka hai fasihi. Ni wazi kuwa fikira hutoka kwenye matamshi na kurudi kwenye matamshi. [...] Duara hili huwa hai katika fasihi. Katika sayansi kuna operesheni nyengine na sayansi inatafsiri vingine nini hai na nini maiti. Kuzielewa operesheni hizi ni kuelewa uhusiano ambao unaotakiwa uwepo baina ya fasihi na sayansi. Kuuelewa uhusiano huu ni kukataa kuwa fasihi ni kielezo cha dhana ya sayansi."

sound and features of sense. Moreover, he makes clear that "understanding that connection means rejecting literature as explanation of a scientific notion." This understanding is similar to how the Italian philosopher Elemire Zolla describes how a text acts on the mind of the reader. Zolla is radical in his description of the sensorial-aesthetic aspect and associative-symmetric logic of poetry and its work on memory. He argues that poetry uses a symmetrical logic in order to penetrate into the consciousness of the reader or listener (2005: 124), down to the deepest layers of memory (*Ibid.*: 138):

> The poet creates a multiple structure; its complexity stuns, because imagination is spurred to project images on the trace of allusions, of signs, of the signs that a verse inspires, while attention moves him relentlessly from one level of communication to the other, until the clear taste of the archetype penetrates into the so distracted and hard-working mind. Poetry is composed by the refractions of words more than by the words themselves.

This play of refraction between the elements of poetry is also described by Roman Jakobson (1979: 108), when he argues that phonological and semantic equivalence is projected as a sequence of the constitutive principle of poetry. Poetic sequences constitute the symbolic, varied and polysemic substance of poetry, thanks to the principles of resemblance and contiguity operating among them. Hence, the equivalence principle can be taken as dominant in the language of literature (and in poetry in particular as a language dominated by the poetic function). The principle of equivalence does not exclude a relation between phonological and semantic aspects of language; what is excluded is a one-to-one relation, the principle of direct refraction. Thus, the poetic language also involves the context through the reference (signified) of language, as Zolla argues with respect to the "multiple structure" of literature and Barber maintains, as I mentioned in the introduction, with respect to the oblique relation between literature and context. The principle of equivalence is also confirmed as a constituent of the poetic function of language by Jakobson.[6] This principle creates a play of refraction among all elements of literature and between texts and context. Texts are composed of both sound and meaning. Paul Ricoeur (2007: 11) argues that the poetic function proposed by Jakobson stresses the message for its own sake at the expense of referential function. That means that the object is not being said directly, it is not described, it can be said only thanks to the complex play of the metaphorical utterance and the ordered transgression of the ordinary meaning of our words. Ricoeur (*Ibid.*: 11) points out that this oblique logic, or "the suspension of direct description", allows poetic language to redescribe the world, while Frasca (2005: 39-40) emphasises the logic of literature and its reception, arguing that the cognitive and mnemonic function of language acts through associative and rhythmic ("metric") logic; hence its potentiality to be poetry. In the same way, Frasca and Zolla point out that literature penetrates a deep layer of memory, while George Steiner (1979: 443-446) proposes learning by heart, using memory as a textual

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[6] This is why I identify comparative analysis as being capable of avoiding the objectification of text, since the ratio of comparison is analogy and the principle of analogy governs the inner structure, the ratio of an artistic text. Thus, the principle of analogy is not something that is outside the text but inside it, and, according to Barber (2007: 5), a text is always "symbiotically linked" with other texts.

approach (thus as an instrument to be closer to the text), which, as Frasca also argues, involves the flesh, our body and hence, according to Abraham Olivier (2007: 12-23, 85), our consciousness. Therefore, using memory and body as a whole is a way to avoid the objectification of literature and to gain knowledge of it. In this way, to use Steiner's words, we can incarnate the text (1979: 440-443). The voice that we use is ours. We read the text and hear the text through our voice. Frasca claims that the incredible stability of the memory connected with language seems to be clearly related to this 'associative' inclination; the information does not proceed by cloning but rather by contagion (similar to Jakobson's argument concerning contiguity and resemblance quoted above):

> If human language is, and it cannot be otherwise, a complex programming, starting probably from the unlimited metaphorization which constitutes the basis of the first 'orientation metaphors' (that is, of the perception of our own self immersed in a space modified by the perceptive, adaptive and apprehensive 'self'), the non-genetic information, then, should use, as it seems at first glance, an 'abstract' machine, substantially 'metric' (because it is 'memorable' for the community) and 'narrative' (because it is associative), that is, a collection of rules for memorization of statements which should be uttered always, for every reiterating act, once and for all, like the sentence of an internal program for location within the community which manages the information. (Frasca 2005: 39-40)

The metric and narrative process described by Frasca invites us to see literature as a deeply basic human faculty entrenched in memory, constitution, identity and associative intelligence. In his article "Critic/Reader", Steiner (1979) endows the reader and not the critic with a prominent role in the process of approaching texts. He points out how the reader inhabits the text and how this ends up becoming the reader's flesh. Seen from this perspective, understanding a text is not a transit of "data" but a transit of matter, and the textual approach is not analytical, it is not a direct view; rather, it is mimetic in that it establishes an oblique relation between the text and the reader:

> The reader, by contrast, inhabits the provisional – in which manifold term he recognizes as relevant the notions of 'gift,' of 'that which serves vision,' and of that which 'nourishes' indispensably. He situates himself within, rather than traversing it with conventional concession and logical embarrassment, the supposition that the text, the work of art, the musical composition are *data* not in the 'scientific' or realistically objectivized sense, but in the primary and archaic signification of 'that is given to us'. That they are not 'objects' even in a special 'aesthetic' category, but 'presences', 'presentments' whose existential 'thereness' (Heidegger's word) relates less to the organic, as it does in Aristotelian and Romantic poetics and theories of art, than it does to the 'transubstantiational'. (Steiner 1979: 439-440)

Steiner, like Hussein, shows the difference between a scientific process of knowledge and a literary one. He emphasises that under the eyes of the reader the text undergoes transubstantiation, a change of matter from object to presence, because the reader situates himself within it, in the body of the text. Hence, a way to prevent objectification and avoid treating literature as "archaeology of knowledge" (Kezilahabi 1985: 221) is to be penetrated by literature to the deepest level of memory. When Steiner (1979: 440) says that he incarnates the

text, what he means is an action-operation through which the reader relates him/herself to the text, and this understanding of text by the reader is mimetic and analogical. It is following a logic of "as if" and thus is not analytical. Hence, in agreement with Hussein, Kezilahabi and Mohamed, Steiner holds a holistic conception of literature, which is founded on the real presence of the text in the reader, a proximity between reader and text. It is a close reading that makes literature a living event.

Mimesis is an analogical way of gaining knowledge. According to Julian Jaynes, analogy is the basis of our consciousness: "Conscious mind is a spatial analog of the world and mental acts are analogs of bodily acts" (Jaynes 2000: 65-66). Consciousness is not a thing, but an "operation" that operates by way of "analogy" (*Ibid.*). Thus, keeping in mind the oblique logic of literature as argued above, I maintain that our consciousness is constituted by analogy working as an uninterrupted operation. Along similar lines, Olivier argues that consciousness is a movement, an operation, a transit, a form of incessant cognition:

> Every moment we perceive entails a transit to possible perspectives, and only from within the transit to the possible can we unfurl the meaning of what we sense, feel and think, in a present moment. Thus the movement of time is inherent to perception. Only as a transitory movement is perception possible. (Olivier 2007: 105)

Sensing, feeling and thinking are acts of understanding that are always in process, so that the key to understanding is in this movement, more than in a point. In this transit lies the action of knowing (and knowing ourselves); it is an inevitable and incessant process of comparison. According to Jaynes, this movement is fundamental to understanding, but in order to understand, we have to create a metaphor, even if unconsciously:

> Like children trying to describe nonsense objects, so in trying to understand a thing we are trying to find a metaphor for that thing. Not just any metaphor, but one with something more familiar and easy to our attention. Understanding a thing is to arrive at a metaphor for that thing by substituting something more familiar to us. And the feeling of familiarity is the feeling of understanding. (Jaynes 2000: 52)

Here Jaynes's conception of analogue comes to the fore: it is the operation of consciousness that works through analogy and thus compares things. If the reader is someone who accepts the intrusion of the text in order to incarnate it (Steiner 1979: 440), and if it is true that the feeling of familiarity or proximity, which is the feeling of understanding (Jaynes 2000: 52), involves the creation of an analogue (*Ibid.*: 65-66), and if we have to consider ourselves as a whole and our faculties (also sensorial) as a tool of knowledge, then it is possible to recognise comparison as a preferential method of analysis and argumentation. Performance, memorisation, comparison and translation, since all use the principle of analogy and all tend to reject the gap between the body of text and the body of the reader, are at the basis of this approach to the text, whose aim is to avoid the objectification of the text (Gaudioso 2019).

Transubstantiation of the text: translation as approach and product

In this section, I will discuss my experience in reading and translating poetry. I will start with an example from the second stanza of Kezilahabi's poem *Mto Nili* (Nile river, 1974: 7).

1 Ninawaona wakimwagilia mashamba yao kwa damu.	1 I see people watering their crops with the blood
2 Ile damu ya watu waliozama zamani ziwani	2 that blood of others who went under long ago in the lake
3 Kwa sababu ya pepo za Julai.	3 because of the winds of July.
4 Ziwa, mto, bahari – maisha.	4 Lake, river, sea – life.

In this stanza, the sound dimension is particularly prominent. This is characterised by the assonance of *wa* in the first and second lines and by the repetition of the vowels *a* and *u* from the first to the third lines, thanks to the use of words constituted by these vowels. These sound features emphasise the word *damu* ('blood'), which contains these vowels and is in an emphatic position. In the second line, the repetition of the words "*-zama zamani ziwani"* is in assonance (but in opposite order of the vowels) with the third line, with the words *ya* and "*za Julai*". These assonances are not casual and seem to express the flow of liquid (blood and water). This sound itself becomes a metaphor of the passage of life, history, time. The blood of the atrocity of history, even if it has sunk into the lake (*-zama ziwani*), has to pass through "*ziwa, mto, bahari*" ('lake', 'river', 'sea') in order to become again *maisha* ('life'). These auditorily powerful lines can synthesise the whole poem and are in perfect assonance with the last line, "*Na yaliyopita, yamepita*" ('And what passed has passed'). For these reasons, in the Italian translation I did for *Smerilliana* (Gaudioso 2015: 184) I tried to transfer the extraordinary sonority of the Swahili lines. Earlier, in 2010, I translated this poem for my BA thesis (2010). While my reading of the poem was the same, in my second translation I arrived at a freer rendition. This shows that the process of translation, which is also a process of understanding and interpreting a text, can take years.

Vedo i loro campi irrigano col sangue.	I see their fields (they) irrigate with blood.
Sangue degli uomini il vento di	Blood of human the wind of July in
luglio nell'acque	the water
del lago estingue.	of lake extinguishes.
Lago, fiume, mare – vita	Lake, river, sea – life[7]

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[7] Interlinear gloss.

The structure of a text in 'free verse' is not imposed from the outside, through, for example, rhymes and assonance, but it is the text itself. This makes translating the text occasionally a challenge. In this effort, I tried to preserve the constitutive *ratio* of the poem, where it is impossible to separate sense from sound. Thus, I tried to imitate the use of sound described above with a repetition of the liquid consonants *r*, *l* and *gl* [λ]. I respected the emphatic position and the repetition of *damu* ('blood'). I tried to recreate the repetition of the vowels *a* and *u* that are constitutive of the word *damu* with the vowels *a* and *ue,* which are recurrent in *sangue* ('blood'), *acque* ('water') and *estingue* ('extinguishes'). The making of a translation pushes us to learn the poem and its poetics by the carrying or transferring of matter (transubstantiation) perceived as sensual elements in our body.

This idea of pushing myself to translate in order to get close to the setting up of a text draws from my own experience. When I was a student, I translated into German the poem *Novembre* by Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912). I initially conceived of this effort as a linguistic exercise. However, as I was translating the poem, I noticed that I was learning about the aesthetics and structure of the text, which to me seemed at the time more important than making a good or a bad translation (I must admit that the translation was rather poor because at that time I had studied German for only one year). The attempt to transfer the poetic features into German brought me very close to the text, to understanding it. How did this process take place? I would like to illustrate the modalities of this close reading using the example of the poem *L'infinito* (*The infinite*, 1818) by Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837). Below I quote the poem with the English translation by Jonathan Galassi (Leopardi 2010: 106-107):

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,	This lonely hill was always dear to me,
e questa siepe, che da tanta parte	and this hedgerow, which cuts off the view
dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.	of so much of the last horizon.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati	But sitting here and gazing, I can see
spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani	beyond, in my mind's eye, unending spaces,
silenzi, e profondissima quiete	and superhuman silences, and depthless calm,
io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco	till what I feel
il cor non si spaura. E come il vento	is almost fear. And when I hear
odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello	the wind stir in these branches, I begin
infinito silenzio a questa voce	comparing that endless stillness with this noise:
vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,	and the eternal comes to mind,
e le morte stagioni, e la presente	and the dead seasons, and the present
e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa	living one, and how it sounds.
immensità s'annega il pensier mio:	So my mind sinks in this immensity:
e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare	and foundering is sweet in such a sea.

According to Giorgio Agamben (2008: 93-102) and Elio Gianola (2003: 229-244), this poem shows the sensualistic poetics of Leopardi. In my Swahili translation, *Umilele*, I tried to reproduce this predominantly sensualistic reading:

Daima kilinipendeza kilima hiki	Always I enjoyed this hill
cha upweke na mimea hii inayozuia	of loneliness and these plants that
kuangalia upeo wa macho yangu.	obstruct
Ila nikikaa huku kuangaza nafasi	me from seeing the horizon.
zisizopimika na kimya kinachozidi	But sitting here to imagine space
utu na utulivu mkuu, mimi ninaumba	incalculable and silence beyond
kwenye mawazo yangu mpaka karibu	the humanity and supreme stillness,
kuogopesha moyo wangu. Nikisikia upepo	I create in my thought until quasi
ukichakarisha miti hii, nalinganisha kimya	I scare my heart. Hearing wind
kisichopimika na hii sauti: nauhisi umilele	swishes those trees, I compare the incalculable
na misimu iliyokufa na iliyopo na inayoishi	silence and this voice: I perceive the eternity
na sauti yake. Kwa namna hii ndani ya huu	and the seasons dead and present and living
ukuu yanazama mawazo yangu:na kujipoteza	and its voice. In this way, in this
kunanipendeza humu baharini.[8]	greatness my thought sinks: and to lose
	myself is a pleasure inside that sea.[9]

This artwork, created by Augusto Massa in 2014, features my Swahili translation of *L'infinito* by Leopardi. The artwork is archived in the Fondo Leopardiano at the National Library of Naples.

According to Agamben, the essence of *L'infinito* is "l'esperienza del sempre"[10] (Agamben 2008: 100); that is why I have translated *infinito* ('infinite') by *umilele* ('eternity'). By so doing, *infinito* coincides with *eterno* ('eternity') through the Swahili term *umilele*, emphasised in the original and in my translation by the emphatic position of *sempre* (*daima*). In fact, the first word

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[8] Here I would like to thank Gaudensia Emanuel for the revision to my Swahili text. I am also grateful to the artist Augusto Massa; thanks to him, my translation of "L'Infinito" by Giacomo Leopardi was transmediated in an artwork, something which contributes to spread the linkages of textual and aesthetic interpretation.

[9] My interlinear gloss.

[10] 'the experience of always'.

Sempre ('always') and the verses "*mi sovvien l'eterno,/e le morti stagioni, e la presente/ e viva e il suon di lei*" ('And the eternal comes to mind,/ and the dead season, and the present/ living one, and how it sounds') show that the core of this lyric is time. It is interesting to note, as Agamben does, that 'experiencing infinity' is a holistic experience ("*mi sovvien*"), a conception which does not really emerge in the English translation by Galassi ("comes to mind"). "*Mi sovvien l'eterno*" is the eternal which comes to me, not only to my mind, but also to my whole body and spirit. This is why I translated "*mi sovvien*" as *nauhisi* ('I perceive, feel'). This sense comes through the perception of "*interminati spazi*" ('unending spaces') and "*sovrumani silenzi*" ('superhuman silences') and "*il suon di lei*" ('how it sounds'). In the case of "*sovrumani silenzi*" I tried to be faithful to the letter, in the etymological sense: I translate "*sovrumani silenzi*" as "*kimya kinachozidi utu*" ('silence beyond humanity'), which evokes both a silence without human presence and an overlying silence for humanity. In the cases of "*interminati spazi*" ('unending spaces') and "*quello infinito silenzio*" ('endless stillness'), Galassi keeps close to Agamben's reading, privileging the experience of infinite. I preferred to emphasise the sensualistic conception, so I translated *interminati* ('unending') and *infinito* ('endless') as *zisizopimika/kisichopimika* ('incalculable'). This choice was inspired by the urgency to follow Leopardi's own conception of openness and vagueness as articulated in his book *Zibaldone*:

> It is very pleasant, for the reason expressed before, the vision of innumerable vast multitudes, like the stars or the people etc., a composite movement, indistinct, confused, irregular, untidy, a vague rolling etc., which the mind can neither determine nor conceive definitely and clearly etc., like the movement of crows or of a vast number of ants or of the rough sea. (Leopardi 2001[1817-1832]: 383).

These lines, written in the same period as *L'infinito*, show that the sense of *vago* ('vague') proves a constitutive element of Leopardi's poetic, as is also the experience of *infinito* or *interminato*. Hence, I translated these words as *zisizopimika/kisichopimika* ('incalculable') in order to create this sense of vagueness that was so fundamental to Leopardi. I interpreted eternity as the rapt, the infinite, intuition as given by the senses, not as an abstraction of them. In fact, Leopardi emphasises perception, rather than its lack: "*mi sovvien l'eterno,/ e le morti stagioni, e la presente/ e viva e il suon di lei*". ('And the eternal comes to mind/ and the dead season, and the present/ living one, and how it sounds'). Gianola (2003: 237) argues that in this lyric we can understand *pensare* ('to think') as *pesare* ('to weight'), thus in agreement with the explanation of *vago* ('vague') in Leopardi's *Zibaldone* and in my translation choice. Gianola (2003: 239) also proposed to read *fingere* ('to imagine') as *plasmare* ('to shape'). Building on this, I translated "*io nel pensier mi fingo*" (literally 'I imagine in my thought'), which Galassi translated as "in my mind's eye", as "*ninaumba kwenye mawazo yangu*" ('I create/ make in my thought').

All these reflections, the exegesis of the Leopardian text, were inspired by the exercise of translation. The essays I am discussing here about Leopardi's poetics were read at a second phase, and only after a first translation of the text. These texts, as did many other texts and writings by Leopardi himself, contributed to my hermeneutics of *L'infinito*. My translation

came into being through my proximity to the text, through reading the text repeatedly and striving for an analogue in the translation phase. In a similar fashion, I translated Kezilahabi's poem *Fungueni Mlango* (*Open the door*, 1974: 23; English translation by Annmarie Drury in Kezilahabi 2015: 35).

Hewa kunikosa	I'm suffocating
Na jasho kunitoka ndani ya chumba	and sweating here inside the room.
Kwa upweke	I feel
Ninajiona nimefungiwa.	imprisoned by loneliness.
Sioni madirisha lakini	I don't see any window, but
Mlango wa karatasi uko mbele yangu	here before me is a paper door.
Ninaugonga kwa mikono	I knock with my hand,
Kichwa na mabega	with my head and my shoulder.
Mlango unatoa mlio kilio,	The door groans a little
lakini mwanadamu hatanifungulia.	But there's no one to open it for me.
Damu	Blood:
Damu puani, damu mdomoni,	Blood in my nose, blood in my mouth,
Damu kichwani itumikayo kama wino.	Blood in my head to be used like ink.
Mikono, kichwa, mabega uchovu.	Arms, head, shoulders: tired.
Kwa kichwa kama cha mbuni	With my head, like the head
Mchangani, tena ninaugonga	of an ostrich in the sand, I knock again,
Lakini mwanadamu hatnifungulia.	but there's no one open it for me.
Ninaona kizunguzungu	I'm dizzy.
Ninapiga kelele kama	I moan like a cow in the slaughterhouse:
Ng'ombe machinjioni:	Open the door –
Fungueni mlango!	this door, open it!
Mlango fungueni!	But there's no one to open it for me.
Lakini mwanadamu hatanifungulia	

I first made a translation of Kezilahabi's poem after my first year of Swahili studies. This poem impressed me so much that it played a great role in my decision to learn Swahili. The translation was made by reading this poem again and again, even if at that time my Swahili was not sufficient. Despite my unsteady pronunciation, I used to read this poem aloud, on my own or for my friends. Thus, the primary knowledge that I had of this poem was sensualistic. Below, I quote my last version, published in a recent translation work, *Ushairi na Uhuru* (Aiello & Gaudioso 2017: 79), which contains translations of Kezilahabi's poem, translated by me, and Abdilatif Abdalla's poems, translated by Flavia Aiello:

Aria mi manca	Air I have not
e il sudore mi cola all'interno	and the sweat drains from me in the room
della stanza	due to loneliness
per solitudine	I feel myself imprisoned.
mi sento rinchiuso.	I cannot see windows but
Non vedo finestre ma	a paper door is in front of me
una porta di carta mi sta davanti	I pound with hands
ci batto con mani	head and shoulders
testa e spalle	the door creaks fatal
la porta cigola funesta	but human is of earth and blood doesn't open
ma è terra e sangue l'uomo non	for me
m'aprirà.	

Sangue	blood
sangue dal naso, sangue dalla bocca,	blood from nose, blood from mouth
sangue dalla testa usato come inchiostro.	blood from head used like ink.
Mani, testa, spalle spossato.	Hands, head, shoulders exhausted.
Con la testa come di struzzo	With the head like an ostrich
nella sabbia, ancora batto	under the sand, still I pound
ma è terra e sangue l'uomo non m'aprirà.	but human is of earth and blood doesn't open for me
Estraniato barcollo	I stumble dazed
urlo come	I shout like
un bue al macello	a cow in slaughterhouse
aprite la porta!	open the door!
la porta aprite!	the door open it!
ma è terra e sangue l'uomo non m'aprirà.	but human is of earth and blood doesn't open for me.

Elena Bertoncini Zúbková played a role in understanding the *ratio* of my own translation. During the book launch of the translation project during the conference *Ngoma na Vailini* at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", she stated that in my translation I went deep into Kezilahabi's poetics, taking into account his philosophy, but commented that I was unable to reproduce the simplicity of Kezilahabi's poetic language. Her comments stimulated reflections about the rendering of the Italian translation. The Italian language I used to translate Kezilahabi's poem is neither simple nor linear. Kezilahabi's use of a 'simple lexicon', his simple poetic language, conceals a complexity which is unravelled only when the poem is looked at as a whole, in its holistic unity. The lexicon I used for my translation of Kezilahabi is simple, while the syntax is often complex. This choice comes from the attempt to carry into my Italian translation the plays of refraction, the sound features of the original poem, which are fundamental for my own interpretation. This choice also tries to respect Kezilahabi's aesthetics (see Gaudioso 2019) and the conceptions of poetry by Zolla, Jakobson, Hussein and Frasca (quoted in the first section of this article). For this reason, as shown in the above translation of *Mto Nili* and of *Fungueni Mlango*, I consider sound features to be dominant not only in the setting up of poetry but also in the translation of a poem. The decision to opt for a complex syntax was also dictated by my tendency to translate texts by a process of foreignisation (Venuti 1995: 20), a process which clearly signals to readers that the text is a translation. It could be objected that the result, my translation, might prove more complex than the original text, although this does not mean that it is less enjoyable. Only the surface (not understood as superficiality but as appearance) of Kezilahabi's texts is simple, not their aesthetics or their philosophical thought (which forms the basis of his poetic work) or their poetics. Hence, if it is true that my translation has a surface more complex than the source text, it is also true that this makes explicit to the Italian reader that the core of the poem is not there, on the surface. Furthermore, in translating a text, it is not my aim to create the illusion that the translation is an autonomous text. In my translating practice I attribute greater value to the fact that the reader should feel the strong relationship between the text that she is reading and another text written

in a different language, which may be inaccessible to her. Poetic foreignisation stretches the linguistic limits of standard Italian for the following reasons: 1) foreignisation is useful to give the reader the feeling that this text is not the original one, which comes from another language (maybe another time, too); 2) my priority is not the language but the comprehension of the poem in its holistic existence (its being in front of the reader/audience). According to Kezilahabi (interviewed in Gaborone 2015, see also Gaudioso 2019), poetry, as other arts, goes beyond every border, even of its substance (language). Thus, my priority is understanding the poetics of the text (its setting up, its aesthetics) rather than using correct language. To me, reproducing assonances has a more prominent role than respecting the linearity of Italian syntax. This makes my translation practice strive to reproduce the poetic and aesthetic power of a text, rather than to adhere to the grammar of a language. I push the language to the limits of comprehension if it is necessary to reproduce a very dominant element of the poem.

I would like to point to the translation of two elements, namely the blood and the groan of the door, of the poem *Fungueni Mlango*. While reading the poem aloud, I was captivated by the recurrence of the word 'blood'. Why was it so? If we read the poem aloud, we notice the repetition of *mwanadamu* and *damu* ('blood') in verses 10-13, emphasised by the homophony of -*damu* in *mwanadamu* (which is *mwana* ('son') plus *Adamu* ('Adam')). In the poem the lyrical I "feels imprisoned" and "moans like a cow in the slaughterhouse". Therefore, the themes of blood and death run through the poem quite vividly. The translation process raised many questions: how can I show this connection if I translate *mwanadamu* by "man" (or "no one")? What is the centrality of blood? And what does "blood in my head to be used like ink" mean? I found an explanation in the philosopher who most influenced Kezilahabi: Friedrich Nietzsche (see Gaudioso 2015 and Kezilahabi 1985). Nietzsche writes: "Of all that is written I love only that which one writes with one's blood. Write with blood, and you will experience that blood is spirit. Whoever writes in blood and proverbs does not want to be read, but to be learned by heart" (2006[1885]: 27-28). These words are pronounced by Zarathustra, the prophet in Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ('Overhuman'). This passage may be Kezilahabi's source, when he refers to blood and writing and to blood and shout. This strong unity between words and blood shows the philosophical influence of Nietzsche on Kezilahabi.[11] Blood indicates life and necessity. Zarathustra is the prophet of the Overhuman, who recognises in him/herself the will to power; this excludes any half-will, for only the true will, the necessary will, can be power, can be creative eternally. In this way, we can also read the will of someone who writes with his blood to be learned by heart. In Kezilahabi's novel *Rosa Mistika* (1971), blood, writing and memory are also associated (Kezilahabi 1971: 110). Before killing herself, Rosa remembers her sins and writes a letter with her blood. In the novel *Nagona* (1990), the connection between writing, blood and memory is also strong (Kezilahabi 1990: 6-7). The protagonist arrives in a city where the people speak the language of silence; only one man speaks and lives near a river

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[11] In his PhD thesis Kezilahabi (1985) is eloquent about this influence; see also Gaudioso 2015.

of blood. The man is also a writer, but the people of the city throw his manuscripts into the river. He starts composing again, but in his mind. The protagonist says: 'They cannot know what you have [a manuscript in the mind of writer]. Will you perform it?' The writer answers: 'No. They will know […] when the river [of blood] overflows and reaches the city' (Kezilahabi 1990: 6-7).[12] Since in Kezilahabi and Nietzsche, blood is associated with memory and writing, I decided to translate *mwanadamu* ('man') using the etymology of the name Adam ('red earth'): "*sangue e terra è l'uomo*" ('blood and earth is man', Gaudioso 2015: 178). This choice allowed me to repeat *sangue* ('blood'), giving back to this term its complexity and centrality in the poem and in Kezilahabian poetics. Blood is a fundamental element in *Kichomi* as well as in Kezilahabi's poetic; proof of this is its occurrence in many of his collections of poems (Ranne 2006; Gaudioso 2010, 2013a, 2015). The second aspect of this translation that will be discussed here is the climax of the poem, when the door groans "mlango unatoa mlio kilio". Annmarie Drury's translation expresses the impotence of the lyrical I; as a result of his efforts, the door only "groans a little". By contrast, in Katriina Ranne's translation the door "cries, shouts" (Ranne 2006: 129). This translation conveys a crucial element, namely the other meaning of *kilio* that is fundamental to the climax of the whole poem, where at the end the lyrical I is in a slaughterhouse. *Kilio,* in fact, is not only the diminutive form of *mlio* ('sound') but can also be the substantive form of *kulia* ('to cry'). In Mohamed A. Mohamed's dictionary, *kilio* has different meanings: 1. cry, shout, scream; 2. crying, weeping; 3. funeral; 4. cry, voice, aspiration (Mohamed 2011: 327). The monolingual TUKI Swahili dictionary also gives *msiba* ('sorrow') as an explanation for *kilio* (TUKI 2014: 227). My translation attempts to match not only the dictionary definitions and my interpretation of the climax in this poem but also the use of this word in other works by Kezilahabi. In the novel *Rosa Mistika*, the protagonist commits suicide, her funeral takes place and 'During the following two days, the people dedicated themselves to drinking. You might think that there was no sorrow' (Kezilahabi 1971: 116).[13] In the poem *Mgomba* ('Banana Tree', 1974), Kezilahabi also uses *kilio* in a way that cannot mean a little sound: "*Isipokuwa upepo Fulani wenye huzuni,/ Unaotikisa majani na kutoa sauti ya kilio*" (Kezilahabi 1974: 8). Annmarie Drury translates this sentence as follows: "except a certain sad wind/ that shakes the grass with a mournful sound" (Kezilahabi 2015: 17). That said, I would maintain that all these translations of *kilio* are legitimate for the poem *Fungueni Mlango*. However, in my view, this little sound has another function there. In Kezilahabi's novel *Kichwamaji* we read: "*Nilisikia mlango ukilia kwa nyuma*" ('I heard the door creaking behind us', Kezilahabi 2008: 184). In this case, Kezilahabi uses the verb *kulia* ('to cry') associated not with an animate being, but with a door. Hence, *kilio* is the creaking of a door and can be associated with a cry of death through the polysemy of the word *kilio*. I once translated the passage into Italian as "la porta sibila un sinistro lamento" ('the door whistles/hisses a sinister

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[12] The Swahili original is as follows: "Hawatapata kujua kuwa unao. Utaukariri?" "Hapana. Watajua tu kwamba ninao. […] Mto huu utakapofurika hadi mjini".

[13] The Swahili original is as follows: "siku mbili zilizofuata zilikuwa za unywaji. Watu walikunywa. Utafikiri hapakuwa na kilio".

lament', Gaudioso 2015c: 178) in order to include this connection between the sound of door and the death. After some time, I felt unsatisfied with this rendering of *kilio*: it is too expressive and deprives the verse of the mystery which it should have up to the end. In *Ushairi na Uhuru*, I translated it "la porta cigola funesta", thus using *cigola* ('creaks') and an adverbial form *funesta* that in English can correspond to 'fatal' (Aiello & Gaudioso 2017: 79). In this way, I tried to respect the climax that ends with an image of death, that of the slaughterhouse.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued for the necessity of a new *werkimmanente Interpretation*, which gives critics a theoretical basis to read texts closely, without confining them to the realm of closed systems (see Gaudioso 2017: 5-6). To do this, the body of the reader or critic (we are our body) should be perceived not as something objective or neutral but as capable of a hermeneutic function with its senses and power of perception. The idea of literature as transubstantiation into flesh (as argued by Steiner, Frasca and Kezilahabi) is not something abstract or romantic; rather, it is empirical and can be a very pragmatic hermeneutical approach to the text through performance, memorisation and translation. The latter is the core of my approach to texts because the process of translation involves all these elements: reading, memorising, creating, comparing.[14] Using these concepts, I have presented my translations of the poems *L'infinito* by Giacomo Leopardi and *Fungueni Mlango* by Euphrase Kezilahabi, which aim to let the poetics of the poets emerge, sometimes at the expense of the language. These experiences of translation enabled me to go deep into the set-up of the texts and recognise their aesthetics and the poetics of the authors. Moreover, by translating or searching for analogues, I aimed at avoiding the objectification of the texts. The living body of the text, its voice (that was mine when I was reading it), makes different types of connections emerge in the reader, for instance, between the aesthetics of Leopardi and Kezilahabi or between the philosophy of Nietzsche and Kezilahabi. These textual linkages helped me to recognise and analyse the textual tradition of a text and to exploit the hermeneutical possibilities. These possibilities of interpretation are what keep an artwork (as literary texts) always open and always ready to say something to the reader, to be understood and interpreted by her – thus, proving to be a living text and not just data, document or archaeological piece. It is precisely through being living event that texts are inextricably enmeshed in all dimensions of time and, by virtue of this, capable of influencing each and every present moment.

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[14] In this article I have not discussed comparison because my focus is translation; for more details of comparison and analogy, see respectively Gaudioso 2017 and 2018.

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