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The "Ripple Effect" of Literary Texts:
Researching, Translating, Applying

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Abstract

Approaching a literary text, especially in the spirit of experimentation, enriches, inspires and empowers teachers of English language, who are frequently on the verge of burnout. To start, this chapter will consider a variety of the new research methods that have the potential to motivate teachers to investigate new literary texts. Next, how to incorporate the target language text via translation will be considered. This part will make references to Susan Sontag's (2003) view of translation as the circulatory system of literature in the world and also to George Steiner's (1975) "hermeneutic motion" – the theoretical framework within which one can also research the potential of translation as a pedagogical tool. Finally the chapter will examine in more detail some specific literary texts in translation to understand how language learning can be empowered through translation. It will be used the image of a "triple ripple effect", that is, of three concentric circles, to suggest the harmonization and co-presence of the three levels (researching, translating, applying).

1. Introduction

In approaching this transversal topic, it is important to specify that this perspective will combine the following beliefs:

1.1 The teacher as researcher

The language teacher makes constant effort to find sources of inspiration in her/his work—often characterized by routine procedures and constant repetition of content—in order to refresh, strengthen and possibly widen her/his teaching repertoire and amplitude of knowledge. Such professional preparation is valuable; the experience and renewal of the teacher's role at school can be seen as parallel and comparable to the researcher work in academic contexts, in the sense that both professional figures rely on research and acquisition of new learning to fulfill their daily job successfully. The effort paid by many teachers at school to train and develop themselves constantly, through the

sharing of good practices, and the reinforcement of their theoretical background — as evidenced by the most recent TESOL scholars' findings and gains — reasserts our firm belief that only in conjunction with research can the teaching profession thrive. Nowadays, there are multifarious ways to get acquainted and updated with the most recent results related to the teaching practice, even scientifically approached. Without the inquisitive and investigating attitude typical of the active researcher, the teacher is destined to gradually lose energy, and, with it, effective impact on her/his audience—regardless of whether it is comprised of demotivated or motivated learners; inevitably, s/he will gradually get flat or empty feedback, detached responses, or completely negative results. S/he will lose the necessary enthusiasm to go on and improve, s/he will burn out and stop exercising her/his role competently.

1.2 Translation as didactic opportunity

From a Translation Studies point of view, within the frame of reference considering the diachronic development of the specific discipline, translation activity is traditionally observed as an additional aid to the learning of a foreign language, being therefore given an ancillary function, so to speak. Similarly, from a methodological point of view, within the frame of reference of ELT, the translation of authentic or even non-authentic English texts, let alone of literary excerpts, has often been considered a difficult, albeit useful, language exercise empowering the grammar of the language at a lexical and syntactic level, once again at the service of the linguistic focus. Only recently, thanks to the works of influential applied linguists, translation and literary translation have regained their significant value in the classroom, even as activities *per se*. The aesthetic quality of the poetical text, and its deviousness from standard language, has always been emphasized by H. G. Widdowson, (1992) for instance, who has devoted great attention to its potential (and is now stressing it again entailing it in his instance of the learner's "lingual capacity"). The rise of areas of interest such as TILT (Translation In Language Teaching) promoted by Guy Cook (2010) has now drawn great attention to the potential of translation in didactic strategy. In this paper we will analyze some of the gains of the Translation Studies branch (according to the Holmes-Toury Map, 1995, as described in Munday, 2012), to find out its possible implications and connections with the methodology of language teaching, considerably so in the so-called "applied branch", especially under the items: translation criticism, revision, review and so forth.

1.3 Application of translational procedures of poetical texts in didactic practices

One of the goals of this paper is also to show how the energy infused by the original author in the composition of poetical texts can be transformed into an equivalent authorial effort in the translational process, where, as a result, we have not just a product but also a parallel instance of process of rewriting. Even though ELT teachers typically deem it too hard a task for learners to translate poetical texts, experience has shown how, just because of its inherent difficulty, the workshop activity linked to the translation of poems, particularly experimental texts, if it is appropriately organized, paced, conducted, and monitored, can in the end prove to be extremely profitable as learning experience due to the force of its challenging impact. Some examples from American experimental poems actually translated into Italian will be provided as practical ground of analysis and observation.

Therefore, the main aim in this paper is the discussion of the didactic value of literary texts in ELT, focusing in particular on poetry, via the agency of translation. Adopting and adapting the image of the "ripple effect", this chapter will identify three circles of reference in our envisaged cognitive framework: researching, translating, applying, a pattern through which we hope it will be shown how language learning can be enhanced and improved by way of the literary translation activity.

As fore-mentioned in the title and abstract, it will be referred to a "triple ripple effect" created by the contact and interconnection of the three different areas above mentioned, defined as "circles" concentrically related:

1. The first circle is provided by the investigation on and identification of themes of interest for the teacher as well as students, choice that can be further supported by a tailor-made selection of literary texts used *ad hoc* for that specific learning environment and context;
2. The second circle regards a close and deep reading of the texts chosen, and the use of critical thinking for its interpretation, with the subsequent creation of an interlingual and, if applicable, intersemiotic translation (according to Jakobson's [1959/2000] distinction);
3. The third circle concerns the pedagogic and didactic application of the multifaceted linguistic potential contained in the literary text, exploiting its benefits and gains in terms of ELT.

In the complex process of language learning, these three different levels—research, translation, application—should never be separate or in isolation, but rather fused,

interconnected, and impinging on one another; sometimes just touching, other times slightly overlapping, most hopefully in a concentric way, that is, like in a ripple, where the initial energy propagates, from one initial input, and generates other outputs, in a sort of ideal chain of actions.

2. Researching

The application of the "ripple effect" in ELT is borrowed from the educational psychologist and well-known theorist Jakob Kounin. He first introduced the term in education, referring to the effective lesson management, based on the following principles: pacing, transition, alerting, and individual accountability. Kounin believed that in order for a teacher to create an effective connection between management and teaching, there needed to be a balanced mix of discipline and dynamism, which he later labeled as "Lesson Movement", achievable through the following elements: with-it-ness, overlapping, momentum, smoothness, and group focus (Kounin 1970; 1977). The overall rationale underlying Kounin's approach is the acknowledgement that, in accordance with the specific lesson preparation and class detailed management, a different behavior can occur from the side of the students. So Kounin developed a set of classroom management theories and practices based on the teacher's ability to organize and plan her/his lessons, using proactive behavior and high student involvement.

"With-it-ness", for instance, is Kounin's term to describe a teacher's ability to know what is going on at all times in his/her classroom. "This can be as simple as making scanning looks around the room every once in a while.   Although is is not necessary for the teacher to know what is going on, the students need to perceive that the teacher knows. Barbara Pressman, comments on Kounin's "with-it-ness" as follows:

> Be there with full concentration and alertness, able to process multiple sensory inputs at once, always using eye contact. The teacher   seems to have x-ray vision. It's almost as if the teacher knows what's going to happen before it actually does. With-it-ness encompasses multitasking, classroom awareness, alertness, intuition, and confidence … the teacher is in control … (Pressman, 2011, n.p.).

"Overlapping", instead, is the ability for a teacher to attend to two issues at the same time, in a word, the ability of creating a multi-tasking atmosphere. An example of

this is when the teacher introduces a new topic while also preventing misbehavior. Such ability is, according to Kounin, essential for a profitable classroom management and is closely related to the idea of with-it-ness (Kounin, 1970; 1977).

"Momentum", on the other hand, can be viewed as "the flow" of a lesson. A teacher must be able to "roll-with-the-punches" while also expecting that the direction taken could not be the one initially desired, despite her/his careful planning, as, in its unraveling, things might go wrong; at the same time, s/he should be able to seamlessly adapt and continue onward in spite of any problems or provocations. Examples of this are students late for the class or the untimely failures of technology. It is important to maintain consistent momentum within activities, in order to avoid students' satiation or boredom. A successful teacher should always provide a feeling of progress, adding variety to the curriculum and classroom environment, every activity should be involving and challenging (Kounin, 1970; 1977).

"Smoothness" is also strictly connected with "Momentum". This element encompasses the ability to keep on track without changing focus or direction due to irrelevant questions or digressions. The teacher's degree of information on a given topic is also fundamental. When a teacher does not have an apparent plan, or when a teacher becomes distracted and leaves a topic hanging unresolved, students will feel a sense of confusion and uneasiness. A lesson should give a sense of continuity to the development of a given topic, or, at least, provide a sense of consequential passage from one topic to the next (Kounin, 1970; 1977).

The final aspect of the "Lesson Movement" scheme, which hopefully results in effective teaching through integrating classroom management and learning dispensation is called "Group focus" (Kounin, 1970; 1977) which is when a teacher to engages a class by building suspense or asking community questions. This can be achieved by way of activities such as asking random questions, or addressing just one student and then eying other students to see if they are prepared to respond. In other words, "Group focus" implies that fact that each member of the group should be induced and invited to pay attention to the task at hand, insisting on the aspect of social reinforcement: each member of the class should be made responsible for the real progression of a topic development in that group.

The image of the "ripple effect" can also be used as a metaphor for the field of teaching language via literary/poetical texts, which, to put it in the English romantic poet W. Wordsworth's words, contain "a certain colouring of imagination". (Wordsworth, 1800) The "ripple effect" metaphor can somehow highlight the subtle

fiber constituting the learner/teacher textural relationship, which, in our opinion, is, or should be, characterized by: liquidity, flexibility, dynamism, energy, and harmony. If we consider the actual movement of the ripple on a liquid surface, we will easily recognize the above mentioned elements coming into play. These same elements are welcome in our suggested (suggestive, too?) vision of teaching.

Starting from the "researching" circle in the ripple so designed, it occurred to me that in past years I had made a study on American poet Charles Olson, author of the famous "Projective Verse" essay (1950), the poetic manifesto of the USA experimental group of writers called Black Mountain Poets. An anthology of theories and texts by the Black Mountain Poets was published in Italy (Goldoni & Morbiducci, 1987). Among the texts therein included there was also that seminal essay, in fronting edition. I was responsible for its first Italian translation, and that gave me the thrill of introducing a fundamental piece of poetical criticism and theory, on the one hand, and on the other, the excitement of adding one "projective" force in my teaching practice. Here is an echo from Olson's essay:

> A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. (Charles Olson. 1950. *Projective Verse*. In Goldoni & Morbiducci, 1987, p. 178)

The recollection took me by surprise, to be honest, because after so many years devoted to applied linguistics rather than poetical aesthetics and literary theory, I was not expecting that particular echo in my mind, but then soon I realized that it was induced by the waves of memory brought about by the process of illustrating the ripple effect! So I was reassured about the fact that a very powerful source of energy for the teacher is represented by her/his own genuine and vivid interests, nourished in time with constant research, capable to create new connections and expansion, like in a series of concentric circles.

It is at this point that another resonance from my previous studies emerged: the concept of "memory", "culture" and "translation", summed up in the "semiosphere" notion postulated by Jurji Lotman (Lotman, 1977; 2001; 2005; c.f. Schönle, 2006). He claims that culture is not a static repository of information; in his theoretical vision, the texts and works that already exist in the system of culture act dialectically with the non-existing culture, creating the so called "semiosphere." The "semiosphere" is the

fluid, dynamic, semiotic environment out of which meaning emerges, a continuum where no element is in isolation. According to such design, natural language represents a "modeling" structure, able to transmit meaning from different cultures, transforming them into "texts". In its dynamic aspects, culture assimilates texts, translates them into its various languages, language being the primary factor, which allows correlation among different semiotic systems.   In shaping these concepts—which in turn, actually inspired my vision of the theoretical and cultural framework within which, to place my translation teaching experience—I was helped by critical readings in the Lotmanian scholarship, particularly by Andreas Schönle's (2006) book on Lotman and cultural studies and, in the Italian repertoire of Lotmanian studies, by Stefano Traini's (2005) work L'eredità di Lotman.

At this stage in the process of construction of the "triple ripple" I also realized that, starting from the initial imaginative metaphor of the ripple, I could assemble different scientific sources to inspire my research, research that I wanted somehow to pour into my lessons in the classroom, in order to share my enthusiasm, interests, and knowledge, with my students and peers, as well. So I could design a first "triple ripple circle sequence" underpinned by:

1. Kounin's "Ripple Effect" for the layer of the educational field;
2. Olson's "Projective Verse" for the literary theory field;
3. Lotman's "Semiosphere" for the semiotic field.

The Italian semiologist Umberto Eco suggests that we must resort to our personal "encyclopedia"—the learning we have accumulated in the course of our studies—if we want to pave our way through the understanding of literary texts and be able to translate them successfully (Eco, 2002; 2003).

Another echo from my personal background was resonating in connection with the geometric shape of the "circle"—implicit in the geometric shape of the ripple—and that was tied to a very popular anecdote regarding the painter Giotto (recall his frescoes in the cathedral of S. Francesco D'Assisi, the frescoes in Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padua and, naturally, the Campanile di Giotto in Florence).

The episode I'm referring to, the so called "O" di Giotto—the perfect circle made by hand—is narrated by Giorgio Vasari, a writer of the Italian Renaissance, in his *Vite dei più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani*, in the 1550 edition printed in Florence: the preamble is that Pope Benedetto XII, who knew Giotto by fame, sends a messenger to his workshop in Florence, to bring him back one of his works:

lo richiese che voleva un poco di disegno per mandarlo a Sua Santità […] Giotto, che cortesissimo era, squadrato il cortigiano prese un foglio di carta et in quello, con un pennello che egli aveva in mano tinto di rosso, fermato il braccio al fianco per farne compasso e girato la mano, fece un tondo pari di sesto e di proffilo, che fu a vederlo una maraviglia grandissima.

[English free translation: "He was asked for one of his drawings by the Pope… Giotto, who was ever so kind, looked at the courtesan, took a piece of paper and drew a circle in red paint by hand, making a compass of his arm: the circle was a perfect shape from all angles, that was a great marvel]

Giotto made a perfect circle by hand, and, as the legend narrates, that was the work that he sent to the Pope!

Art historian E. T. Falaschi, in his 1972 essay observes that the perfectly controlled line is symbolic of the artist´s technical skill. Vasari may also have narrated the incident to demonstrate Giotto´s intellect as being superior to that of the Pope´s courtier [as the *Lives* include many stories which support his own theories or illustrate an artist´s personality]. The "O" represents something which seems simple yet can only be achieved by someone of genius… [and the tale, which displays the artist´s self-confidence and a facet of his character, spans the concepts of genius and dexterity]. [E. T. Falaschi. 1972. Giotto: The Literary Legend. *Italian Culture.* Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 1972) 1-27]

When Giotto hands it in to the messenger, he replies: "Is that all?" The Pope would eventually understand Giotto's sublime genius, and the anecdote has reverberations up to our days (not only did the Italians generate the idiom "as perfect as Giotto's circle") but also contemporary American poet Kathleen Fraser incorporates the reference in her poem "GIOTTO..ARENA", from *il cuore: the heart*, *Selected Poems 1970-1995*.

> Dante watched Giotto paint Enrico
> (they talked at Arena)
> "Not by system,
> but by wrist,"
> G. said…

(Fraser, 1997, p. 122)

This episode, where the past is echoed in the present, juxtaposes the presence of visual elements with verbal ones, in unexpected   intertextual and intersemiotic combinations. In addition to this, we must take into account the popularity of J. Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" which is used in language teaching so that other forms of intelligence (such as visual and kinesthetic) may be appreciated and addressed.

Furthermore, as the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach paves its way more and more in the ELT international scenario, new   interesting textbooks are widening our didactic perspective. As an example, we can quote *English Through Art* (2011), by Peter Grundy, Hania Bociek, and Kevin Parker. In this book, there are numerous activities shaped upon the implementation of communicative skills through commentaries and creative tasks springing from the artistic masterpieces. Such a multidisciplinary approach seems to favor conversation in class and   self-expression, from a spoken language point of view, but also promotes critical/creative writing.

Another cultural resonance evoked by the geometric shape of the circle in the ripple metaphor, comes from a mythical source, according to which the circle (echoing the shape of the sun and moon) is the most important geometric symbol. For the Neo-platonic philosophy, the circle is also the most perfect shape. The temple of Apollo, for instance, is described as circular: think of the "mythical" Stonehenge in Southern England and think of Atlantides, described by Plato as a system of concentric circles. God, too, in mystical thought, is the "omnipresent circle". The circle has no beginning and no end, and in mankind's history soon turns into the first revolutionary instrument, the invention of the "wheel";   the circle also embodies the plunging of the soul into death and its rebirth. Therefore the circle also symbolizes men's attempt to become "godlike".

English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) indeed refers to poetry as "something divine":

> Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all […] It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things. (Shelley, 1821)

Paraphrasing the Shelleyan text, we can add that poetry also acts in another and "more divine manner", as it awakens and widens the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle

of a thousand "unapprehended" combinations of thought. Poetry "enlarges" the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of "ever new delight", which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts: "The frequent recurrence of the poetical power, it is obvious to suppose, may produce in the mind a habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and its effects upon other minds." (Shelley, 1840; 1977, p. 67). Poets "measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit" (Shelley, 1840; 1977, p. 67).

3. Translating

The second circle in the "ripple effect" is translation. In our global world only translation can ensure mediation and circulation. As mentioned above, the vision of translation as an aid to language learning has turned from a mere grammatical approach, based on a one-to-one relationship, to a wider, more culturally-loaded approach. Translation was once used to ensure correctness in the target language, typically centering on the rote study of grammatical rules and structures of the FL. Such methodology caused the translation of usually unconnected and decontextualized sentences, emphasizing the mechanical aspect. Nowadays, under the gains of the Translation Studies as an academic discipline, the scenario has completely changed and become such as to encircle the semiosphere stance we were above referring to.

In her book *Translation and Language Education* (2014) Sara Laviosa makes explicit reference to Guy Cook's scholarly and groundbreaking contribution titled *Translation in Language Teaching* (2010), from which the acronym TILT (translation in language teaching) derives. Laviosa acknowledges the coinage and reports Cook's main principles: "Cook's translation-oriented pedagogy is framed within a perspective on curriculum theory for language teaching that draws on the principles of four major educational philosophies: technological, social reformist, humanistic an academic" (Laviosa, 2014, p. 41). Laviosa paraphrases Cook's tenets as follows: education should serve practical purposes; education should bring about desirable social changes "developing certain values, beliefs, and behaviours" (Cook, 2010, p. 105); education should provide personal fulfilment individual development; education should "preserve, develop, and transmit knowledge" (Cook, 2010, p. 105).

At the same time, it should also be acknowledged that translation has always represented a means of the circulation of literatures and cultures. Susan Sontag defined it as "the circulatory system of world literature" during her famous St. Jerome Lecture

delivered on Sept. 23rd, 2002 and later published on June 13, 2003, and soon translated all over the world. The Italian translation followed in 2004. Here are some significant and pertinent quotes:

> "Translation is the circulatory system of the world's literatures"; "to translate means many things, among them: to circulate, to transport, to disseminate, to explain, to make (more) accessible", "I shall argue that a proper consideration of the art of literary translation is essentially a claim for the value of literature itself": "Literary translation, I think, is preeminently an ethical task, and one that mirrors and duplicates the role of literature itself, which is to extend our sympathies; to educate the heart and mind; to create inwardness; to secure and deepen the awareness (with all its consequences) that other people, people different from us, really do exist".

It is needless to underline the educational value, which is encapsulated in such practice and discipline. It is also interesting to note the statement presented in "Guidelines for Peer Review" as reported in the journal titled *Profession 2011* issued by the Modern Language Association of America (264-267). Here we can read: "[e]very translation is an interpretation; each begins with a critical reading, then expands and ultimately embodies that reading" (*Profession 2011*, p. 265). This is probably why "[m]ore and more academics are therefore undertaking translation as a component of their professional activity and as a natural extension of their teaching" (*Profession 2011*, p. 264).

In such statements it is clear that translation has been an indispensable component of intellectual exchange and development throughout recorded history. Today, the ever-accelerating interaction among cultures and economies in our globalized world is exponentially increasing the need for translation. As more and more postsecondary institutions incorporate translation studies and translator training into their curricula, there is a growing need for faculty members who are scholars and practitioners of translation. Moreover, the translation of a work of literature or scholarship or any major cultural document "can have a significant impact on the intellectual community, while the absence of translations impedes the circulation of ideas" (*Profession 2011*, p. 264). This brings us full circle with Sontag's words and with our initial proposition, "translation is the circulatory system of world's literatures".

Translation is a necessary and beneficial loop. George Steiner, in his landmark book *After Babel* (1975), describes a so called "hermeneutic motion" which locates

itself in the philosophical area of translation studies. Jeremy Munday, in his useful book *Introducing Translation Studies. Theories and Applications.* (Munday, 2012), re-proposes entirely the circular path to approach translation, as envisaged by Steiner. The thinker postulates that, approaching a text to be translated, we must first exercise an action of "Initiative Trust":

> There is the initiative trust, an investment of belief […] in its meaningfulness […]. We venture a leap: we grant *ab initio* that there is "something there" to be understood […]. All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding, which is translation, starts with an act of trust…. (Steiner, 1975, in Venuti, 2004, pp. 193-4)

Then there is "Aggression":

> The second move of the translator is incursive and extractive…. The thing there […] only comes into authentic being when it is comprehended, i.e. translated .[…] Comprehension, as its etymology shows, "comprehends" not only cognitively but by encirclement and ingestion. [In the event of interlingual translation the manoeuvre of comprehension is explicitly invasive and exhaustive. Saint Jerome uses his famous image of meaning brought captive by the translator.] We "break" a code: decipherment is dissective… (Steiner, 1975, in Venuti, 2004, p. 194).

The following step is "Incorporation":

> The third movement is incorporative […]. The import, of meaning and of form, the embodiment, is not made in or into a vacuum […] There are innumerable shadings of assimilation and placement of the newly acquired, ranging from a complete domestication… all the way to the permanent strangeness […] but whatever the degree of "naturalization", the act of importation can potentially dislocate or relocate the whole of the native structure. (Steiner, 1975, in Venuti, 2004, p. 195).

The fourth and last stage is "Restitution":

> The enactment of reciprocity in order to restore the balance is the crux of the métier and morals of translation […]. The appropriative "rapture" of the translator […] leaves the original with a […] residue. Unquestionably there is a dimension of loss, of breakage – hence […] the fear of translation, the taboos on

revelatory export which hedge sacred texts, ritual nominations, and formulas in many cultures. But the residue is also, and decisively, positive. The work translated is enhanced. […]. Being methodical, penetrative, analytic, enumerative, the process of translation, like all modes of focused understanding, will detail, illumine, and generally body forth its object. […]. The motion of transfer and paraphrase enlarges the stature of the original […]. We are back at the problem of the mirror, which not only reflects but also generates light. (Steiner, 1975, in Venuti, 2004, p. 196).

4. Applying

So we have now reached the third circle of our ideal and metaphorical image of the "triple ripple effect" in connection to the application of translation in ELT. Louise Rosenblatt's stepping-stone work and theories are important to mention here, while referring to the use of literary works in (any) language teaching (1969; 1978). Her notion of the reader's response, her transactional theory of reading—where the involvement of the reader with the text is viewed as a form of "transaction" and the distinction she made between "efferent" and "aesthetic" value of the literary text in its encounter with the reader, are paramount (1969; 1978; 1980; 1985).

Among the various literary genres available, we have chosen the application of the poetical text in translation to implement language teaching. As a matter of fact, the intrinsic features that characterize the poetical text lend themselves to such use: poems are generally short, circumscribed and self-sufficient; they have a concentration on lexis rather than syntax; they introduce lexis carrying ambiguity, ambivalence, polysemes and puns; they present a massive use of figures of thought and speech; they carry over denotative and connotative meaning; they finally require close reading, analysis and interpretation. For all these reasons—where a density of semantic texture is combined with a rich presence of figures of thought and speech—poems appear to be the ideal kind of text for linguistic exploitation and didactic application.

In addition to this, when the reader deals with a poem, s/he must use all cultural knowledge and experience that s/he is endowed with in order to provide her/his personal interpretation, taking into account allusions to events and facts contemporary to the author's historical period, connections to other works of the same author, references to other cultural contexts represented by contemporary literary movements, but also trends in other disciplines such as visual arts, music, cinema, and so on. In other words, the poetical text can actually encapsulate a whole universe, to arrive at the

famous Blakean pronouncement "to see the world in a grain of sand".

As Maley and Duff claim "Poetry offers a rich resource for input in language learning" (Maley & Duff, 1994, p. 7). Furthermore, "the language used to agree and disagree about 'meaning' in a poem will not be fundamentally different from the language of discussion integral to any interactional activity" (Maley and Duff, 1994, p. 7). The two authors list under "poetry's unique advantages" the following (pp. 8-11):

1. universality: "poetry ad a form of language use is universal among all human being. No known language is without it" (p. 8);

2. non-triviality: "It is in the nature of poetry do deal with important experiences […] and to heighten our perception not only of such experiences, but also of the seemingly trivial or unimportant" (p. 8);

3. motivation: "the realization that, though they [the students] may be relatively inexpert in the language, they can still appreciate (to a degree) what is thought to be 'difficult' use of language […] is far from negligible moral booster" (p. 9);

4. hands on: "One of the most important conditions for learning a foreign language […] is the opportunity to play with it […] to test its elasticity, to test and explore its limits. Poetry is par excellence the medium in which this can be done" (p. 9);

5. ambiguity and interaction: "any poem means more than one thing. In many poems there is a core meaning about which most people would agree […] but a poem may also suggest individual interpretations" (p. 9);

6. reactions and personal relevance: "poetry offers a […] type of spoken language which we may call 'reactional' […] This development of a personalized reaction to texts […] is […] a very important part of the language learning process" (p. 10);

7. memorability: "Poems we have read and enjoyed […] tend to stick in our minds. […] Very often, they go on repeating themselves in our inward ear […] they appear to form a loosely coordinated system of unconscious or barely conscious memories which enables the learner to retrieve grammatical and lexical information" (p. 10);

8. rhythm: "Stress and rhythm are often taught through the imitation of model sentences. Our experience […] inclines us to believe that students are more likely to retain stress and rhythm through exposure to poetry" (p. 11);

9. performance: "There are very few occasions when the written word can be spoken naturally, especially in choral form. Poetry […] offers a ready-made opportunity for such participation […] poetry can be read aloud by groups

without it seeming to be unnatural" (p. 11);

10. <u>compactness</u>: "One of the advantages of poems is that they offer a complete context in (usually) compact form. […] a poem is a self-contained world" (p. 12).

In addition to these points, Widdowson noted the following in his seminal *Practical Stylistics*:

> Poems are peculiar uses of language. Their meaning is elliptical and elusive, deflections from the familiar […] often perversely obscure in their flouting of conventional standards of clarity and commonsense […] frequently eccentric. Poetry is always in some sense perverse and its relevance lies somewhere in its perversity. It is significant because it signifies in unusual and devious ways. (Widdowson, 1992, p. 12)

4.1 Poems in translation

The following poems are drawn from Robert Creeley's work (1965/67; 1968/69; 1982), and have all been previously translated into Italian. Creeley (in Olson, 1950) stated, "form is never more than an extension of content"; no pre-imposed form can pre-exist the making itself of the poem, but rather form and content proceed together as the poem find its way in words.

Keeping in mind the geometric image of the circle evoked by the ripple metaphor, the following poem titled "Joy" offers a very small circle, determined by emptiness, as it is just a hole (which turns out to be a "whole", in the end).

<div align="center">

Joy

I could look at

an empty hole for hours

thinking it will

get something in it,

will collect

things. There is

an infinite emptiness

placed there.

</div>

(Creeley, 1967)

[Italian translation: *Potrei   fissare / un buco per ore / pensando che / si riempirà. // raccoglierà / cose. C'è / un infinito vuoto /messo là.* Morbiducci, 1987, p. 83].

The poem is very simple linguistically, therefore not difficult to understand on a mere referential level. The translation can proceed on a one-to-one verbal correspondence. However, there is more in it, it is the way that these simple words are juxtaposed that gives the real meaning. The real meaning is not in the denotative level, but connotative one. In fact, we have to arrive and understand its title "Joy". Where does the poet gather joy from? From a hole?

Students can be invited to consider the syntactical structure (fragmented and syncopated) and figurative texture (with massive use of antinomies and oxymorons), as we believe these are the two dominant features in the text. The prose-like rhythm is slowed down and broken by the poetical line division: *I could look at / an empty hole for hours/ thinking it will /get something in it, // will collect / things. There is / an infinite emptiness / placed there.* It is not by chance that Creeley's rhythm has been assimilated to jazz music; in fact the rhythm is syncopated. The line-division emphasizes the single noun phrases and verb phrases, giving them pre-eminence as real objects placed in space. There is no discursive texture, because the sentence is fragmented, on purpose, in order to give evidence to the lexical element and induce a *ralenti* effect, favoring almost a meditative attitude.

The figurative/lexical element unravels itself in the repetition of the "empty/emptiness" lemma: we can remind the students of the different parts of speech, and of the morphological function of the *–y* morpheme   for adjectives and *–ness* morpheme for nouns, eventually asking them to complete list where the same word formation occurs and make them reflect on that; on the same morphological level, we can identify the function of the *–ing* suffix, which generates the continuous aspect of the verb, as in think-*ing*, but at the same time intensifies the sound pattern with repetition; we can make the students notice the insistence in the spatial marker "there" (that appears twice in eight lines), which can be grouped with the verbal forms "collect" and "placed" (presence of spatiality), and, by converse, with "hole" and "emptiness" (absence of space). Therefore, on a denotative level, the expressions "infinite emptiness" and "will collect things" are antithetic, and the noun phrase "empty hole" is in contrast with the verbal phrase "will get something in it": so, we can infer that the denotative level, quite simple and plain, generates a quite complex connotative layer of meaning where the dominant trait is the opposition of the pair "absence-presence". The

following chart juxtaposes the two motifs:

The oxymoron in the phrase "infinite emptiness" and in the opposite pair "collect/emptiness" creates a connotative tension. It is just this intricacy which generates meaning, and we could say that the theme of this poem is "joy" - as the title recites - because the poet juxtaposes the materiality and physicality of the "hole" to its virtual potentiality of

Figure 1. Chart of two motifs

"collecting things". It is the action of the human agent to give substance to the hole, a springboard for fulfillment. This is a tentative interpretation and possible explanation of the reason why there is joy in emptiness: is it just because "emptiness", the non space, evokes the "infinite"?

The qualifying aspects of the poem are conveyed by the poet's the attitude of humbleness, expectancy and surprise: he is almost looking for an epiphany that could be – for one instant - the realization of our life, by way of thinking. This connects to another poem by Creeley where he says:

As real as thinking
Wonders created
By the possibility –

Forms. A period
At the end of a sentence which

Began *it was*
Into a present,
A presence

Saying
Something
As it goes.
[…]

(Creeley, 1968)

[Italian translation: *Reale come pensare / meraviglie create / dalla possibilità - // forme. Un punto / alla fine di una frase / che / iniziò "c'era" / nel presente, / una presenza // che dice / qualcosa / mentre va.// Nessuna forma / senza attività. // Tutto parole - / giorni – o / occhi -// o l'accaduto / è evento dolo / per chi osserva?* Morbiducci, 1987, p. 84]

Here the most striking elements are:

1. the ambivalence of the words "wonders" and "forms" which can be both verbs or nouns;
2. the polysemic quality of "present" (noun and adjective but also verb, if with a different stress);
3. the insisting play on "present/presence", "as it goes", that is the opposition "static/dynamic": an allusion to the elusiveness of presence, to its ephemeral status? Or once again the pair: physical presence/ virtual potentiality?

Creeley's poetry has been paralleled to the sculpture of Alberto Giacometti, a Swiss minimalist sculptor. Critics agree in defining his poetry "minimalist", too (Morbiducci, 1987, p. 232). This reference draws attention on the fact that we can ask students to combine their interpretation of the poem, what the poem evokes to them, with a work of art: an approach which in Italy is fully exploited in Silvana Ranzoli's books (Ranzoli, 2011).

The juxtaposition of artifacts of visual arts together with poetical texts is quite appropriate in the case of Robert Creeley, as he used to cooperate, connect and compose with other artists, in particular we mention the case of his collection *IT* made of paintings by the Transavanguardia Italian artist Francesco Clemente and Creeley's poems. In *IT* there are 12 poems by Creeley and 64 pastels by Clemente (Creeley & Clemente, 1989), and they are a comment on each other.

One final poem by Creeley, also very short, is titled "Water" (from the collection *Words,* 1967):

Water
Water drips,
a fissure of leaking
moisture spills
itself unnoticed.

What was I looking at,
not to see
that wetness spread.

(Creeley, 1967)

The interesting aspect here is based on the lexical insistence on "visual" actions, conveyed by the verbs "look" and "see", and, by converse, by the parallel contrasts carried over by the expressions: "unnoticed / not to see". Also noticeable are the references to "liquidity": "water drips / moisture spills / wetness spread".

Incidentally, the status of liquidity is a constant motif in Zygmut Bauman's works, one of the major interpreters of our time: the eminent sociologist wrote a series of books all based on the notion of liquidity. Asking the students to identify this element, we shift the focus from a mere lexical competence to a deeper interpretive process and cultural approach, leading them from memorization to meaning search and identification, from lower order to higher order linguistic skills. The conclusive message of the poem can be exactly the allusion to the "liquid" dimension of our present life: being the matter of the poem its liquidity, a substance with mutable shape, can this become a metaphor for our existence? The irony—or should we rather say "wonder"?—consists in taking into consideration a banal thing, such as the leaking of water, which ends up being a serious space for reflection.

Certainly, in this chapter's "ripple" concentric and expansive circularity, a poem on water dripping is exactly what is needed to conclude, with the hopes of creating a ripple effect…

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