Translatability, Combined Unevenness and World Literature in Antonio Gramsci

'Our research is thus into the history of culture and not literary history; or rather it is into

literary history as a part or an aspect of a broader history of culture'

(Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, p. 205).

Introduction

This paper[1] takes its point of departure from two contemporary research initiatives. The first

of these is the recent scholarship on the centrality of linguistic theory and the ideas of

language and translation to Antonio Gramsci's Marxism;[2] the second is the emergent

discussion of world literature under the sign of 'combined and uneven development'.[3] These

initiatives are linked, certainly; but to the best of our knowledge they have not hitherto been

brought together in any sustained fashion. We therefore take some steps to link these two

initiatives here, believing that what Gramsci has to say about literature, translatability,

cultural 'interference', 'Southernism', and so on, including in some of his lesser-known

passages, has a great deal to contribute to today's debates about the world-literary system.

Gramsci's ideas are significantly at odds, for example, with Apter's argument that increased

translation of foreign language texts will in itself generate increased awareness of the various

forms of social experience across the globe; it is significantly at odds with Damrosch's thesis

that the movement of texts across borders creates value; and it is significantly at odds with

Moretti's position that takes volume of publication as a reliable marker of the tastes of

reading publics.

The theory of combined and uneven development originated in the work of Engels and Lenin, but it is associated above all with Trotsky, who – writing in the 1930s, on the basis of his analysis of conditions in Russia in 1905 and China in 1925-7 – attempted to account for the effects of the imposition of capitalism on cultures and societies hitherto un- or only sectorally capitalised. In these contexts, Trotsky proposed, the imposed capitalist forces of production and class relations tend not to supplant (or are not allowed to supplant) but to be conjoined forcibly with pre-existing forces and relations. The outcome is a contradictory 'amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms' – an urban proletariat working in technologically advanced industries existing side by side with a rural population engaged in subsistence farming; industrial plants built alongside 'villages of wood and straw', and peasants 'thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plow'.[4]

The theory of 'combined and uneven development' was therefore devised to describe a situation in which leading or 'advanced' capitalist forms and relations exist alongside 'archaic forms of economic life' and pre-existing social and class relations. It sought to explain how revolutionary transformation could be produced by rural and urban factions acting in concert (symbolised by the cross-hatched sickle and hammer), and was not reliant on industrialised urban groups leading the charge alone, as many nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century Marxists had believed. On this definition, the theory has obvious relevance to Gramsci's work, which demonstrates an abiding interest in the developmental discrepancies and unnevennesses of Italian society – a society whose unification as a nation-state lay only just

beyond the horizon of living memory at the time of Gramsci's own writing. Prior to the mid nineteenth-century, as Ives has noted, 'the [Italian] peninsula was divided into different political regimes often under the control of foreign powers, most notably France and Austria. The *Risorgimento*, literally meaning revival or resurgence, was the cultural and social movement of the nineteenth century that led to political unification in 1861 and finally added Venetia and Rome by 1870'.[5] This particular history is decisive for Gramsci: 'Shortly after political unification', as Ives goes on to say,

> Massimo d'Azeglio coined a phrase about Italian history that would become proverbial:
> 'Italy is a fact, now we need to make Italians.' This process of making 'Italians',
> including Italy's political, economic, social, linguistic and cultural dimensions,
> constitutes much of the context of Gramsci's political and cultural theory. It must also be
> noted that while Italy is more extreme than other countries, all nation-states have
> involved similar processes whereby citizens come to think of themselves, to a greater or
> lesser degree, as Italians, French, Chinese, Canadians or South Africans. In Italy, this
> process of unification, and the obstacles to it, gave rise to the Southern Question, which
> arose from the differences between the North and the South – political, economic,
> cultural and social differences (p. 35).

The formal relationship between Trotsky's thought and Gramsci's has been explored in some of the sociological literature.[6] But in this essay it is rather the *general* conceptual affinity between the idea of 'combined and uneven development' and Gramsci's thinking about the national-popular, the politicised convergence of heterogeneous social groups, that interests

us. Gramsci's understanding that the 'backwardness' of some (chiefly southern) regions of Italy was not an autochthonous or intrinsic feature – a function of the delayed or retarded pattern of these regions' own internal growth – but precisely a consequence of their purposive *under-development*, was of course over-determined by his own biography and personal experience as a Sardinian. Personally and 'geo-culturally', as well as theoretically and ideologically, he was always acutely conscious of what – to distinguish it from the specifically Trotskyist notion – we propose to call 'combined unevenness'. We use the term both to recall Trotsky's original discussion, and also to develop further the cultural registration of social experience, the composition and recomposition of class relations. We seek here to advance the claim that realms initially seen as outside of value-formation (the rural, the cultural, the domestic) are, in fact, intrinsic to the reproduction and transformation of social relations, within the expanded sphere of accumulation. Hence his writings on 'Southernism', which sought to account for the social and political discrepancies between 'north' and 'south' in Italy after unification; and hence also his abiding interest in culture and 'the language question' in Italy.[7] Both of these speak to his grasp – 'intuitive' and a matter of cultural 'inheritance', but then also deeply reflected upon and consolidated in his mature thought – of combined unevenness, the politics of culture and the culture of politics.

I. *Eugene Sue, romanziere Italiano*?

In his prison notes on the concept of 'National-Popular', Gramsci reflects on the well-known, but nonetheless counter-intuitive, circumstance that the mass Italian readership is known to eschew Italian writing (whether 'popular' or 'artistic') in favour of French serial novels of the

19th century: 'if the Italian newspapers of the 1930s want to increase (or maintain) their circulation', he asks, 'why must they publish serial novels of a hundred years ago…? Why is there no "national" literature of this type in Italy, even though it must be profitable?'[8] Such reading preferences indicate – or so Gramsci speculates – that the Italian people are subject to 'the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely related to foreign intellectuals than to "domestic" ones, that there is no national intellectual and moral bloc, either hierarchical or, still less, egalitarian' (*SCW,* p. 209).

One of the more interesting aspects of Gramsci's commentary on this exocentrism of the mass reading public in Italy (a situation that he contrasts with that prevailing in France, Britain, Germany, and Russia) is that he does not construe it through any narrow, nationalist lens. If contemporary Italian readers are more disposed to 19th-century French than to 20th-century Italian fiction, it must be because the former meets their 'needs and requirements' where the latter evidently fails to do so. The problem is then not that the mass Italian readership is deficient in its 'national' consciousness, but instead that the literature currently being produced in Italy (including that which self-consciously styles itself 'Italian') lacks any affinity with or connection to popular culture:

> [T]he entire 'educated class', with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation, not because the latter has not shown and does not show itself to be interested in this activity at all levels, from the lowest (dreadful serial novels) to the highest – indeed it seeks out foreign books for this purpose – but because in relation to the people-nation the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners (*SCW,* p. 210).

Failing to recognise themselves in contemporary 'Italian' fiction, whether conservative ('hierarchical') or progressive ('egalitarian'), the Italian popular classes turn to writing that *does* meaningfully represent or crystallise their experience, even though this writing derives from another country and an earlier century. It is the 'absence of a national-popular literature' that leaves 'the literary "market" [in Italy] open to the influence of intellectuals from other countries' (*SCW*, p. 215). Italian readers therefore come to 'know the popular figure of Henry IV better than that of Garibaldi, the Revolution of 1789 better than the Risorgimento and the invectives of Victor Hugo against Napoleon III better than the invectives of Italian patriots against Metternich. Culturally speaking, they are interested in a past that is more French than Italian. They use French metaphors and cultural references in their language and thought' (*SCW*, pp. 215-6).

Gramsci speaks of the 'passionate interest' of the mass readership in 20th-century Italy in 'French monarchical and revolutionary traditions' (*SCW*, p. 215). This 'interest' derives from the relative 'backwardness' of the 'political and intellectual situation' in Italy: he sees the 'same problems' being raised in Italy in the 1930s as 'were being raised… in the France of 1848'; moreover, the Italian groups and class fractions for whom these particular problems are being raised are 'socially very similar to their French counterparts of that time: bohemians, petty intellectuals of provincial origin, etc.' (*SCW*, p. 346). The developmentalist concept of 'backwardness' is mobilised here, to be sure, but it becomes clear that Gramsci is not thinking in terms of either a stagist or an evolutionary theory of history. There is no sequential periodisation – no narrative of an unfolding sequence of events – of the kind that

Benjamin, writing only a few years later in his remarkable notes on the concept of history, would criticise as 'historicist';[9] nor is there much emphasis placed on a diffusionist understanding of literary history, of the kind that Moretti – following Even-Zohar – moots in some of his writing on the world literary system: 'While studying the market for novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth century', Moretti writes (and we can easily imagine him to be speaking also of the literary sphere in the Italy of Gramsci's time),

> I reached very similar conclusions to Even-Zohar's. Here, the crucial mechanism was that of *diffusion*: books from the core were incessantly exported into the semi-periphery and the periphery, where they were read, admired, imitated, turned into models – thus drawing those literatures into the orbit of core ones, and indeed 'interfering' with their autonomous development. And then, diffusion imposed a stunning *sameness* to the literary system: wave after wave of epistolary fiction, or historical novels, or *mystères*, took off from London and Paris and dominated the scene everywhere – often, like American action films today, even more thoroughly in the smaller peripheral markets than in the French or British core.[10]

It is clear, of course, that diffusionist theories of cultural transfer cannot simply be set aside. As Sassoon observes in his monumental study, *The Culture of the Europeans*, 'All of the genres popular in France and Britain were also popular in Italy'.[11] Italian critics themselves were acutely aware of the hegemony of British and (especially) French culture, and often linked it to a more wide ranging *esterofilia* – 'the love of all that is foreign' – a 'characteristic of Italian cultural consumption to the present day' (p. 484). Sassoon also explains that the popularity of

French romantic fiction among the mass Italian readership caused some consternation among the Italian cultural elites, whose understanding of what great literature should be did not allow for an easy accommodation of Balzac, let alone Dumas, Sue or Verne:

> Italian readers in the nineteenth century were weaned on novels by Dumas, Sue and Verne and their local imitators, as they had been by Scott and his local imitators. And when they went to the theatre they enjoyed French melodramas by Scribe and farces by Labiche. A play based on Balzac's *Père Goriot* was performed seventy times between 1838 and 1850. Contemporary sources mention how 'everyone' was reading Balzac either in the original or in one of the many competing translations. Italian critics, while recognising Balzac's ability to involve the reader in a way no one in Italy was able to do, had a high-minded view of what a great author should be. He should be someone like Manzoni, and the opposite of Balzac: he should be someone with 'values', a certain air of other-worldliness, committed to the educationally uplifting, having a suitable lifestyle, and not overtly concerned with monetary matters. Balzac was regarded as too popular, too entertaining, and hence a corrupting model for Italian writers. The result was that many Italians read Balzac for pleasure, and Manzoni out of duty (483).

However, Gramsci's prison writings tend not to travel this diffusionist road. Where Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, had memorably framed the reiteration of historical 'facts' in terms of belatedness and inauthenticity – 'the first time as tragedy, the second as farce'[12] – Gramsci instead locates analogical identities or strict parallels between different cultural 'expressions' (discourses, paradigms, texts, languages, etc.) without privileging the earlier iterations over

the later. However strange it may sound, his suggestion is that twentieth-century Italian readers turned to the fictions of Dumas and Balzac and Sue because these works spoke to (and of) the conditions and social relations prevailing *in their own lives*. They turned to these works, in other words, not because of 'cultural cringe' – not, that is to say, because the Italian literary market was dominated by the French market or because Italian culture felt itself somehow 'inferior' to French culture, although both of these situations obtained – but because *Les Mystères de Paris* and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* gave them what they needed as a reading public – concepts, socio-symbolic representations, an experience-system – thereby distinguishing themselves from the contemporary writing in Italy, which served mainly, according to Gramsci (and for socio-historically determinate reasons that he went to great lengths to elucidate and explain) to mystify and obscure the actual social conditions and relations.

II. *Against autonomy*

As Hegel was to Marx, so Croce is to Gramsci, who refers his conviction that literary history is never solely a matter of hermetically-sealed 'literary' lineages to his famous idealist compatriot. 'Poetry does not generate poetry', Croce had written: 'there is no parthenogenesis. There must be an intervention of the male element, that which is real, passionate, practical and moral' (qtd. *SCW*, p. 107). The useable insight here – Gramsci suggests that Croce's 'observation can be appropriated by historical materialism' (p. 107)[13] – is that where the poets of today attempt to produce new work merely by studying, internalising and, as it were, extending the work of their forebears, the results are almost

always disappointing. True poetic innovation requires on the contrary a renewal of 'spirit', a 'remaking' of the human landscape: 'The greatest critics of poetry warn one not to resort to literary prescriptions', Croce had said, 'but… to "remake man". Once man is remade, the spirit renewed and a new life of affections has emerged, from this will arise, if at all, a new poetry'. Distancing himself from Croce's androcentric vocabulary through his use of scare-quotes, Gramsci nevertheless proposes a materialist adaptation of Croce's idea. 'Literature does not generate literature, and so on', he writes: 'that is ideologies do not create ideologies, superstructures do not generate superstructures other than as an inheritance of inertia and passivity. They are not generated through "parthenogenesis" but through the intervention of the "male" element, history, and the revolutionary activity which creates the "new man", that is new social relations' (*SCW*, p. 107).[14] Elsewhere, he writes that '[i]n language too there is no parthenogenesis, language producing other language. Innovations occur through the interference of different cultures, and this happens in very different ways…' (*SCW*, p. 178).

The idea of 'interference' is brought to bear here in a way that exceeds the terms of its typical deployment in comparative literary studies, in which, as Even-Zohar has pointed out, the tendency has been to work only 'with the vague notion of "influence" and [to confine oneself]… to uncritical comparisons of isolated cases'.[15] Gramsci uses 'interference' to account for change (or 'innovation', as he tends to call it) in the spheres of culture and language.[16] 'Innovations occur through the interference of different cultures', he writes (*SCW*, p. 178). But this is not always or necessarily a matter of 'domination' and/or 'subordination' at the level of nations or whole social formations. Gramsci's understanding of 'interference' is culturally

neutral: in this he anticipates Even-Zohar, who defines the term formally as follows: 'Interference can be defined as a relation(ship) between literatures, whereby a certain literature A (a source literature) may become a source of direct or indirect loans for another literature B (a target literature)' ('Laws', p. 54).

Gramsci's focus is directed less to the *politics* of 'interference' than to its various modalities: it 'happens in very different ways', he observes, distinguishing between 'mass' and 'molecular' interference – the phenomenon's two extreme forms of appearance, presumably: 'as a "mass" [*massa*], Latin altered the Celtic language of the Gauls, while it influenced the German language "molecularly" [*molecolarmente*], by lending it individual words and forms' (*SCW*, p. 178). Moreover, '[t]here can be interference and a "molecular" influence within a single nation, between various strata, etc.; a new ruling class brings about alterations as a "mass", but the jargons of various professions, of specific societies, innovate in a molecular way' (*SCW*, p. 178). The transformation of culture in a given social formation can occur as a result of the importation or imposition of foreign materials, obviously;[17] but it can occur also when a particular social group or class fraction comes to feel that the cultural touchstones it has hitherto received as 'naturally' or 'spontaneously' (or parthenogenetically) encoded in its own (e.g., national) tradition or lineage, no longer suffice to register its distinctive social experience. As Even-Zohar puts it, '[i]nterference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself':

> A 'need' may arise when a new generation feels that the norms governing the system
> are no longer effective and therefore must be replaced. If the domestic repertoire does

not offer any options in this direction, while an accessibly adjacent system seems to possess them, interference will very likely take place ('Laws', p. 69).

When a literary genre, form or device – think of the gothic, for instance; or lyric; or free indirect discourse – breaks (or is torn) away from its original, received or institutionalised modality, it is because emergent social developments require and animate new modes: not only are new forms of practice always coming into existence and pressing their claims upon the established order, but dominant forms are always being put under pressure, while residual or obsolete ones are always either being swept away or else refunctioned and given new purchase.[18] Gramsci insists, though, that if culture clearly registers transformations in social relations (of production), it also 'precognises' or anticipates social developments. Cultural expression precedes political expression; the latter, in fact, is in part a production of the former:

> Every new civilization, as such (even when held back, attacked and fettered in every possible way), has always expressed itself in literary form before expressing itself in the life of the state. Indeed its literary expression has been the means with which it has created the intellectual and moral conditions for its expression in the legislature and the state (*SCW*, p. 117).

Gramsci places special emphasis on the *volatility* – or even *provisionality* – of social relations. These are never static, but always in process, being forged, negotiated, contested, etc. They are structured partly through hegemony, or consensus formation, and not solely through

coercion and violence. What is involved here is never only top-down containment, since '[a] given socio-historical moment is never homogeneous; on the contrary it is rich in contradictions. It acquires a "personality" and is a "moment" of development in that a certain fundamental activity of life prevails over others and represents a historical "peak"; but this presupposes a hierarchy, a contrast, a struggle' (*SCW*, p. 93). Moreover, it is in cultural practice that the building-blocks of consensus are initially envisaged and put into place:

> In history, in social life, nothing is fixed, rigid, or definitive. And nothing ever will be. New truths increase the inheritance of knowledge. New and ever superior needs are created by new living conditions. New moral and intellectual curiosities goad the spirit and compel it to renew itself, to improve itself, to change the linguistic forms of expression by taking them from foreign languages, by reviving dead forms and by changing meanings and grammatical functions (*SCW*, p. 31).

The *formal* dimensions of literary works are analytically important, in these terms, because they index the complex social logistics of their moment; they are the means through which resolution of tensions, conflicts or contradictions is mooted.

III. *Pirandello and Pirandellism*

In opposition to his celebrated contemporary, Pirandello, who, in deploring the lack of 'a conception of life and man'[19] in Italian culture, had argued for the actuality of an Italian national consciousness and called for its registration in literature, Gramsci suggests that the 'value' of Italian literary works must be assessed in the light of their ability to stage the contradictions of their time. Where the illusion of social or national homogeneity is projected,

the existence of social, regional, religious, etc., division is disguised or euphemised. Gramsci

has no use for the notions of *Weltanschauung* or *Zeitgeist* because they seem to him to presume

the harmonised uniformity of a given 'age' or 'society'. As he puts it in a rebuttal of the social

philosopher, Baratono, 'the life and taste of an age', far from being 'something monolithic',

are 'rather full of contradictions' (*SCW*, p. 99).[20]

Gramsci's commentary on Pirandello in his prison notes is particularly rich. He had already

written extensively on Pirandello's theatre for the Piedmont edition of the Socialist Party

organ, *Avanti!* during his years in Turin in the latter half of the 1910s. He returns to the

Sicilian writer in his prison writings, distinguishing there between Pirandello's great

'intellectual and moral, i.e. cultural' significance (*SCW*, p. 138) and his (aesthetic or 'artistic')

significance as a *writer*. The two aspects face in different directions, Gramsci believes. The

former is a function of Pirandello's cosmopolitan intellectualism: 'In Pirandello we have… the

critical awareness of being simultaneously "Sicilian", "Italian" and 'European' (*SCW*, p. 142).

Gramsci concedes that Pirandello 'has done much more than the Futurists towards

"deprovincializing" the 'Italian man" and arousing a modern "critical" attitude in opposition

to the traditional, nineteenth-century "melodramatic" attitude' (*SCW*, p. 139). The problem

then is that whenever this self-consciously held 'critico-historical' sensibility – a sensibility

that, following Tilgher's influential 1920s study of Pirandello, came to be known in Italian

literary circles as 'Pirandellism' – is imported into his writing, Pirandello's plays and novels

creak under the weight of their 'abstract intellectualism'. It is, by contrast, in his plays

'conceived in dialect where a rural "dialectal" life is depicted' (*SCW*, p. 141), that Pirandello

seems to Gramsci to emerge as a great *writer*, rather than as the representative of a politico-intellectual standpoint (however progressive and culturally important): 'where is [Pirandello]… really a poet, where has his critical attitude become artistic content-form and not just an "intellectual polemic"…"', he asks – and then goes on directly to answer his own question: 'To me it seems that Pirandello is an artist precisely when he is a dialect writer and I feel that *Liolà* is his masterpiece…' (*SCW*, p. 142).[21]

Pirandello's dramatic work in this mode is that of

> a Sicilian 'villager' who has acquired certain national and European traits, but who feels these three elements of civilization to be juxtaposed and contradictory within himself. From this experience has come his attitude of observing the contradictions on other people's personalities and then of actually seeing the drama of life as the drama of these contradictions (*SCW*, p. 145).

The suggestion here is that in Pirandello's 'dialectal' dramas, the historically discrete and discontinuous aspects of the social identity of his characters – Sicilian/Italian/European; villager/cosmopolitan; provincial/national; country/city – are not forced to resolution, or subordinated into a progressive, tendentially universalising narrative, but are allowed to appear as they actually exist in social life, in all their combined unevenness, partiality and contradictoriness:

> It is nothing other than a reflection of the fact that a national-cultural unity of the Italian people does not yet exist, that 'provincialism' and particularism are still deeply rooted in their customs and in the way they think and act. What is more, there is no

'mechanism' for raising life collectively from the provincial level to the national and European level. Hence the 'sorties', the individual raids made towards this end, assume low, 'theatrical', absurd and caricatural forms (*SCW*, p. 145).

By the same token, Gramsci is critical of the idea, popular in intellectual and artistic circuits in the early decades of the 20th century, that there is a new 'poetic aura' abroad in Italy, a spirit-of-the-age that is bringing a 'new art' into being. To speak in these terms is, for him, merely tautological: 'one cannot talk about a new "poetic aura" being formed… "Poetic aura" is only a metaphor to express the ensemble of those artists who have already formed and emerged, or at least the process of formation and emergence which has begun and is already consolidated' (*SCW*, p. 98). Essentially a ritual of consecration, the notion of a 'spirit-of-the-age' (we might think of such slogans as 'the roaring twenties', for instance, or 'the slacker generation') can contribute nothing to the analysis of cultural history or indeed to an explanation of the qualities of any of the literary works implicated by it, because it mistakes effect for cause.

Similarly, literary consecration functions like a political election or referendum: it comes after social opinion has already been formed or manufactured. 'Even the proliferation of "literary prizes"', Gramsci writes, 'is nothing but a relatively well organized collective "recommendation" (with varying degrees of fraud by militant literary critics' (*SCW*, pp. 113-4). Indeed, the importance of literary works in the shaping and forming of cultural sensibility has little to do with literary critics, who come belatedly to the scene. 'We might say that

literature is a social function but that literary men, taken individually, are not necessary for this' (*SCW*, p. 275). Just as Marx had argued that finance capitalists are unproductive, insofar as they only insert themselves into and hive off profits from pre-existing capital flows, so Gramsci sees the hurly-burly created by the activities of 'literary men' as a distraction from the more consequential matter of the social processes through which audiences seek out cultural works capable of communicating their experiences: 'intellectuals conceive of literature as a "profession" unto itself that should "pay" even when nothing is immediately produced and that should give them the right to a pension. Who, though, is to decide that such and such a writer is really a "literary figure" and that society can support him while waiting for his "masterpiece"?' (*SCW*, p. 274).

Where literary history is concerned, it is, in these terms, the *formal* aspects of works that are decisive. Works achieve significance when they become collectively or communally available, not when they are consecrated by critics or when they achieve a high volume of sales as commodities under an individual's proprietary signature in the literary marketplace. In popular writing, 'the writer's name and personality do not matter, but the personality of the protagonist does. When they have entered into the intellectual life of the people, the heroes of popular literature are separated from their "literary" origin and acquire the validity of historical figures' (*SCW*, p. 350). Such figures acquire a 'particular fabulous concreteness in popular intellectual life' (*SCW*, p. 350): the critical concern is then shifted, methodologically, from *authors* to *types* and *figures*, from authorial intentions to the visible (social) figurations represented in literary works. Gramsci insists, for instance, that Renaissance humanism did

not emerge on the back of an intellectual paradigm shift from the divine to the human. 'Man was not "discovered"', he writes: 'rather a new form of culture was initiated, a new effort to create a new type of man in the dominant classes' (*SCW*, p. 217).

This suggestion that the iconic figures of generic fiction – Frankenstein's creature, say, or Heathcliff, or Sherlock Holmes – are more culturally significant than the commodity-texts in which they appear is obviously not to be understood as an argument for the 'autonomy' of the literary work, whose true 'value' then comes to be realised in the price-setting literary marketplace. Gramsci holds that such popular literary figures are significant because – for whatever determinate reasons, which it is the task of the literary critic to discover and lay bare – they successfully condense and mediate social tensions for a wide range of readers. It is interesting to contrast him here with Moretti, who also argues, both that it is '[r]eaders, not professors, [who] make canons',[22] and that literary history should address itself to the matter of form rather than consecration or literary capital. Concerning canonicity, Moretti writes that 'academic decisions are mere echoes of a process that unfolds fundamentally outside the school: reluctant rubber-stamping, not much more. Conan Doyle is a perfect case in point: *socially* supercanonical right away, but *academically* canonical only a hundred years later. And the same happened to Cervantes, Defoe, Austen, Balzac, Tolstoy…' ('Slaughterhouse', p. 209). And concerning literary history, he urges us to think socio-formally, to focus on 'the forces behind…. literary history': 'Not texts' he insists: 'Texts are real objects – but not objects of *knowledge*. If we want to explain the laws of literary history, we must move to a formal plane that lies beyond them: below or above; the device, or the genre' ('Slaughterhouse', p. 217).[23]

Moretti uses the example of Conan Doyle to shed light on certain key characteristics of literary evolution. In his Sherlock Holmes stories, he argues, Conan Doyle unwittingly stumbled on the device of the 'clue'. The accident proved a lucky one: the (bourgeois) reading public liked Conan Doyle's use of this device and rewarded him with its acclaim. 'As more readers select[ed] Conan Doyle over L.T. Meade and Grant Allen, more readers [were]… likely to select Conan Doyle again in the future, until he end[ed]… up occupying 80, 90, 99.9 percent of the market for nineteenth-century detective fiction' ('Slaughterhouse', p. 211). Through his use of the literary device of the 'clue', Conan Doyle fundamentally changed the form of detective fiction.[24]

This argument as Moretti presents it is compelling up to a point.[25] But it is striking that he does not attempt to pursue the further question as to why the specific device of the clue should have magnetised bourgeois readers in the first place. What cultural energies and conflicts found articulation in this device? What specific cultural work did the 'clue' perform for readers at this precise moment in time, which is, notably, that of the inauguration of imperial or monopoly capital? It is questions of this latter type that most interest Gramsci: he is not content to ask himself what a particular cultural figure, device, or genre *means* or how it operates *in its own restricted economy*, but wants always to look beyond it, to the social tensions that are being addressed through it. The analogy to be drawn is with Marx's method in *Capital*: where Marx unravels the 'riddle' of the commodity-form by way of elucidating the larger circuits of value in capitalist society, Gramsci's cultural theory unravels the narrative

device or form (Pirandello's dialectal drama, for example) to elucidate the conflictually constellated social forces of Italy in his time. For instance, Sassoon argues that the clue mattered because it was the first historical instance in which readers were invited to participate as active interpreters, rather than passive receivers, of the narrative. In other words, it allowed readers to imagine that they might make better companions to Holmes than Watson. Hence, the clue became a formal device with which readers could cement and enact a new, more active, subjectivity (*Europeans*, p. 432).

Gramsci proposes that the cultural experiences captured for twentieth-century Italian readers in nineteenth-century French serial fiction also find registration in popular Italian opera – '[t]he one cultural form in which Italy held a dominant position in nineteenth-century Europe', as Sassoon reminds us, and 'the one which it exported massively' (*Europeans*, p. 484) – and in the Italian cultural elite's fascination with Nietzsche. 'Seldom has a cultural genre been so closely associated with a single country,' Sassoon writes about Italian opera, which became overwhelmingly the dominant operatic model and the dominant language of opera throughout the world (*Europeans*, p. 258). Yet it is not simply Italian opera's pre-eminence in the world that magnetised Italians, as a form of national pride, but that as a cultural form and institution, opera was the medium within which Italians could make the capitalist world-system intelligible. 'It would be wrong to reduce Italian success to the excellence of its composers and performers', Sassoon contends, since the

> real cause of Italian operatic success must be found in the contrasting environments
>
> facing French and Italian composers. The French were composing for a narrow élite, a

national market entirely centred on Paris, and were entirely dependent on it. The Italians, even if they had no other ambition than to triumph in Italy alone, were composing for several great operatic centres – Venice, Florence, Naples, Milan and Rome – and a multitude of minor ones. A ferocious selection process was at work, weeding out the less innovative and dazzling, the provincial and the boring. The winners could roam throughout Europe enjoying the enormous 'brand' advantage of 'made in Italy' created by their predecessors. French composers looked only to Paris. The Italians – at least where opera was concerned – thought in 'global' terms (*Europeans*, p. 259).

For the local elites, Nietzsche became the hallmark of their unwillingness to 'think' internationally. 'Petty bourgeois' and 'petty intellectual' readers of French serial fiction are embarrassed and 'ashamed of mentally justifying their notions with the novels of Dumas and Balzac', Gramsci writes. 'So they justify them with Nietzsche and admire Balzac as an artistic writer rather than as a creator of serial-novel type figures. But culturally the real nexus seems incontrovertible' (*SCW*, p. 356). It is the last sentence here that is crucial. Literary/cultural forms are to be understood as mediated expressions of social forces that are not themselves 'literary' or 'cultural'. The logic of determination here is radial; but it is not isomorphic. Each medium or form or genre has its own particular and irreducible structuration (its own particular 'set' – economy and means of distribution), such that its way of 'expressing' social forces will be unique to it. Thus Gramsci notes that in Italian popular culture, 'music has to some extent substituted that artistic expression which in other countries is provided by the

popular novel' (*SCW*, p. 378). There is therefore a 'relationship between… Italian opera and Anglo-French popular literature' – not at the level of virtuosity or artistic talent (Sue is not Verdi), but at that of cultural *function*: 'Verdi occupies the same place in the history of music as Sue in the history of literature' (*SCW*, p. 379) – the same *place*, that is to say, but not the same *status*. Gramsci locates a significant correspondence in the encoding – the social function – of the work associated with Verdi and the French authors of *romans feuilletons*. It is not that *La Dame aux Camélias* is 'the same' as *La traviata*, obviously. Rather, the suggestion is that in their formal structuration – as socially legible works – both works 'speak' of and to the same 'real nexus' of social forces and relations. Thus Sassoon points out that in the Italian nineteenth century, it was opera rather than – as pretty much everywhere else in Europe – literature that became the *national* genre, that is, the bearer of Italian cultural nationalism:

> Verdi's initial rise to fame occurred in a period of exceptionally intense musical competition. Rossini, and later Bellini and Donizetti, had created a situation in which operatic music had become the dominant form of Italian cultural production. No major native theatre had been built on the heritage of the Commedia dell'arte. There was no important contemporary popular literature, in spite of Manzoni's efforts: Italy's cultural élites read foreign novels, harked back to Italian classics (Dante and Petrarca), and were hostile to innovation. Opera became, almost unavoidably, the national genre. Verdi's early works appeared in the shadows of Donizetti, who died in 1848, allowing Verdi to become his natural successor. From then on, Verdi's star never stopped rising… [H]e came to be regarded as the cultural representative of Italian nationalism. A biography printed in 1913 called him the 'maestro' of the Italian revolution. Elsewhere in Europe

the 'national poet' revered by nationalists was usually a writer. Italy, though, had Verdi. There were few real alternatives: the actual period of the Risorgimento (1848-61) had produced no major Italian poets, no major novelists (Manzoni was still alive but his best works were behind him), and no playwright of note (*Europeans*, pp. 558-9).

For historically specific reasons, analogous responses to particular social determinants find their way into particular cultural forms – into those forms, but not, interestingly, into others. These forms differ from context to context. The question as to why certain cultural forms make themselves available to social representation in moments of crisis or epochal transformation while others do not do so – or cannot – is an important one for cultural theory.

IV. *Combined unevenness*

Gramsci argues that significant literary renewal is never a purely 'literary' matter. One does not change the existing literary landscape by resisting or repudiating the currently dominant works or schools or tendencies. One changes it, instead, by breathing the air of the new, of the world as it really is and as it really is becoming. 'The most common prejudice is this', he writes: 'that the new literature has to identify itself with an artistic school of origins, as was the case with Futurism'. But literature and culture do not evolve through parthenogenesis:

> the premiss of the new literature cannot but be historical, political and popular. It must aim at elaborating that which already is, whether polemically or in some other way does not matter. What does matter, though, is that it sink its roots into the humus of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional (*SCW*, p. 102).

We have already seen that, as Gramsci understands it, literature is constantly developing as new social experiences create the conditions for the emergence and development of new forms, devices and genres. This quite often takes place on the basis of the resurrection, revival and refunctioning of older or foreign conventions since, as we have also seen, these latter sometimes approximate or stage social conflicts better than new or avant-gardist figurations arising from the socially aloof terrains of what the cultural elites call 'literature'. But we need to dwell for a moment on Gramsci's emphasis on the 'popular' in all of this. How are we to imagine a 'new literature as the expression of moral and intellectual renewal'? His answer is that it is 'only from the readers of serial literature' that one 'can… select a sufficient and necessary public for creating the cultural base of the new literature' (*SCW*, p. 102). A 'new literature' will arise or emerge when its conditions of possibility – transformed or transforming social relations, as experienced by men and women in the mass, in the routine course of their lives – have become sufficiently sedimented in social life to be given symbolic representation. We think, for instance, of the novels of Dickens – or, at least, of Dickens as Williams positions him: 'The most important thing to say about Dickens… is not that he is writing in a new way, but that he is experiencing in a new way, and that this is the substance of his language'.[26] And, elsewhere:

> Dickens's ultimate vision of London is then not to be illustrated by topography or local instance. It lies in the form of his novels: in their kind of narrative, in their method of characterisation, in their genius for typification. It does not matter which way we put it: the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the

experience of the city. What matters is that the vision – no single vision either, but a continual dramatization – is the form of the writing.[27]

Of course, Williams is presenting Dickens here as the registrar of a world-historical development that happens in London *first*, before anywhere else. It is then Dickens's 'luck' as much as his 'genius' to discover or forge a new form of writing adequate to the epochally changed and still changing social landscape of his time. But Gramsci is grappling, by contrast, with the effects and consequences of Italy's relative *backwardness*. How is the question of literary form to be phrased in socio-historical contexts in which, far from their being an overlap between popular (or 'mass') experience and the structures of feeling that animate 'new' literature – as is the case with Dickens – there is a vast and seemingly unbridgeable distance between the emergent cultural forms and 'the national content'. 'Since every national complex is an often heterogeneous combination of elements', Gramsci writes,

> it may happen that its intellectuals, because of their cosmopolitanism, do not coincide with the national content, but with a content borrowed from other national complexes or even with a content that is abstract and cosmopolitan. Thus Leopardi can be described as the poet of the despair created in certain minds by eighteenth-century sensationalism, which in Italy had no corresponding development of material and political forces and struggles as it did in the countries where it was an organic cultural form (*SCW*, p. 118).

Addressing himself to the dispute between 'contentists' (*contenutisti*) and 'calligraphists' (*calligrafi*) that played itself out in Italian letters in the early 1930s,[28] Gramsci argues that on neither side of this dispute is there an adequate recognition of the fact that in order to consolidate itself, a 'new literature' requires a correspondingly new 'moral and intellectual world' (p. 117) in which to take root. This 'world' cannot be parachuted in from above; unless there is an organic connection between popular consciousness and the forms being mooted, confirmed, or refunctioned in the contemporary production of literature, what is produced will never be able to catch history on the wing, as it were – that is to say, to make its mark as something not merely *new*, but also socially *consequential*. In a remarkable passage – rich, but complex and requiring patient elucidation – Gramsci writes that

> When, in a backward country, the civil forces corresponding to the cultural form assert themselves and expand, not only are they certain not to create a new and original literature but there will – naturally enough – emerge a 'calligraphism', a generic and widespread form of scepticism about any serious and profound passionate content. 'Calligraphism' will thus be the organic literature of those national complexes which, like Lao-tse, are born eighty years old, without fresh and spontaneous feelings, without 'romanticisms', but also without 'classicisms', or else with a mannered romanticism in which the initial crudeness of the passions is that of an artificially rejuvenated old man trying to relive his youth rather than a stormy virility or masculinity, while their classicism will be likewise mannered, in other words merely a 'calligraphism', a mere form like the livery of a majordomo (*SCW*, p. 118).

What Gramsci calls 'calligraphism' (*calligrafismo*) in this passage we understand as a formalist response to the 'contentist' proposal that Italian literature should 'modernise' itself by mimicking, replicating or appropriating literary styles and themes appearing elsewhere, in the more 'advanced' social formations. Confronted with the 'contentist' injunction to write like Hugo (or Dickens) but in Rome or Milan – an injunction whose *abstraction* is starkly apparent to them as a problem, even if its *elitism* isn't – the 'calligraphists' respond by calling for a return to traditional or archaic forms of expression, in and through whose recrudescence they hope to locate and confirm an authentic national culture. Gramsci is acutely sensitive to literary works in which temporal unevenness – uneven time – is formally encoded or disclosed. But calligraphism promotes the restoration of or return to older, 'classical', genres and modes conceived as somehow timeless and uncontaminated in their crystalline purity;[29] and the idea that the present might be renewed through a mannered restoration of the past strikes Gramsci as ridiculous. He has no time either for the calligraphist exhumations of an idyllic Italian past or for the delirious contentist gyrations with the newest styles and themes, imported from elsewhere and conscientiously aped and imitated. The dispute overall he judges to be of little lasting importance: 'It is more a controversy between petty and mediocre journalists than the '"birth pangs" of a new literary civilization' (*SCW*, p. 119). These formal concerns are linked with similar ones on the nature of language.

V. *From 'prestige' to 'hegemony'*

Beginning his career as a student of philology at the University of Turin in the years just prior to World War I, Gramsci followed the fierce dispute between neo-grammarian and neo-

linguistic schools of thought with great interest. The neo-grammarians conceded the
historicality of languages as conventional systems. But since their focus fell on phonetic
change, which they understood to be governed by invariant laws, the 'comparative philology'
that they called for typically took the form not of an empirical examination of languages
changing in actual use but rather of a (proto-) structuralist analysis in which the
impersonality or 'collectivity' of the language system – its essential externality to
intentionality and conscious will – was identified as a fundamental feature. (Although not
himself directly aligned with the neo-grammarians,[30] Saussure's distinction between *langue*
and *parole* in the *Cours de linguistique générale*, and especially his privileging of the former over
the latter in analysis, led him to a similar general conception.)

In opposition to this position, the neo-linguists insisted that language was essentially
expressive: it was an aesthetic practice, intentional, a matter of consciousness and self-
consciousness, and subject to political will. In an article published in 1947, the neo-linguist
case against the neo-grammarians was forcefully restated by Bonfante, who had himself been
active in the polemics of the 1920s and 1930s before leaving Italy (for Switzerland and then
the United States) after the fascist seizure of power. 'Although the neogrammarian school
claims to be "historical"', Bonfante wrote,

> in reality it has ignored history altogether. French, for the neogrammarians, is merely an
> unorganized complex of phonetic laws showing how Latin words were transformed
> (*testa* > *tête*) – nothing else. They see no connection whatsoever between the
> development of the French language and the history of the French people, their

struggles, their religion, their literature, their beliefs, their life. The same phonetic laws could have taken place just as well in Siberia or in Patagonia as in France. Nothing binds them to the French people, the French history, the French mentality. Neogrammatical linguistics is thus linguistics in abstracto, in vacuo. The neolinguists, though stressing the esthetic nature of language, know that language, like every human phenomenon, is produced under certain special historical conditions, and that therefore the history of the French language cannot be written without taking into account the whole history of France – Christianity, the Germanic invasions, Feudalism, the Italian influence, the Court, the Academy, the French Revolution, Romanticism, and so on – nay, that the French language is an expression, an essential part of French culture and French spirit.[31]

Gramsci's general allegiance in this dispute lay of course with the neo-linguists. Like them, he insisted that language is the 'expression of lived experiences (*esperienze vissute*)'.[32] But most of the neo-linguists worked with a rather uni-directional conception of language in relation to the field of power. For them, linguistic change was seen to derive more or less directly from changes in the heteronomous domain of politics, and to proceed from top to bottom, from the apices of power to the dusty plains of the great unwashed. 'The innovation of a king has a better chance than the innovation of a peasant', as Bonfante succinctly put it.[33] Here, Gramsci followed the somewhat exceptional (and dissenting) lead of Bartoli, his own teacher at Turin, in arguing that languages are diffused not through top-down imposition, but from the bottom-up: 'Linguistic pressures', he wrote in a 1918 essay on Esperanto, 'are exerted only from the bottom upwards' (*SCW*, p. 30)

As Lo Piparo has observed, Bartoli and his associates sought 'to explain the diffusion of a language [*lingua*] beyond its original geographic and social confines by recourse to *geographic centers and social groups capable of irradiating cultural prestige*'.[34] How does it come about that those imbued with cultural prestige are able to influence others beyond the pale of their own social praxis, to persuade these others (without formally 'convincing' them) of the relative superiority of their own language and linguistic practices? Such questions pose themselves with luminous intensity in Italy, where the history of the emergence of 'Italian' as the national language is especially complex. As Sassoon has written,

> [s]ome of the numerous Italian dialects, such as Sicilian and Venetian, produced a written literature. But it was Tuscan that towered above all the others, thanks to outstanding writers of the calibre of Dante, Francesco Petrarca, and Giovanni Boccaccio, revered throughout Europe. This helped Tuscan to become the literary language of educated Italians, and eventually the language of all Italians after the country became an independent state in 1861. At that time Italian was habitually spoken by only 400,000 people in Tuscany, 70,000 in Rome, and perhaps 160,000 people in the rest of the country, almost all members of the educated classes – in all, 630,000 out of twenty million (*Europeans*, p. 22).[35]

For Bartoli and his associates, Lo Piparo writes, '[a] language is diffused neither by the force of armies nor by state coercion – this is the sociocultural thesis of the Italian neo-linguistics and of [the] French sociological school – but because the ones who speak a different language

spontaneously consent to the speech of the groups with cultural prestige'.[36] What is at issue

here clearly goes beyond politics in the narrow sense – that is, concerning the ability of

empowered agents or groups (state, army, king, etc.) to dictate terms and enforce compliance

– to implicate in addition the whole territory of social reproduction and the forging of

common sense. In grappling with these issues himself, Gramsci moved from his initial focus

(shared with Bartoli) on *prestige* to a concern with what he called *hegemony*, directing his

attention to the question of how specifically empowered agents were able to link different

social groups under their leadership. We might note two immediate differences between a

prestige-based explanatory schema and one based on the idea of hegemony.

First, prestige bespeaks a group seeking pre-eminence in its field through exclusion, while

hegemony indicates an attempt to expand a social alliance through inclusive expression.

Cultures of prestige may concentrate power, but their narrowness and restrictedness are also

sources of potential vulnerability. Cultures of hegemony, by contrast, are often diffuse, but

they are more durable because they are able to accommodate widespread interests

simultaneously. Think, for example, of the very different implications of a prestige model of

'RP' English ('Received Pronunciation'), on the one hand, and of a hegemonic model of

dialectal Englishes, on the other, in the cultures of contemporary British radio and

television.[37] A focus on prestige disposes one to identify given cultural forms or generic

narratives as something like the 'property' or 'inheritance' of the particular groups or

constituencies who express themselves through them: *their* modes of actualisation of these

forms must be emulated or idealised in order for their symbolic or ideological potentials to be

tapped. A focus on hegemony, by contrast, leads one to emphasise the 'bundling' of relatively disparate, multiple interests, brought together under a singular rubric – movement, discourse, standpoint – and 'represented' in and by it, but finding in it a diversity of positions, emphases, and even arguments. The work of hegemony invites and organises mass acceptance or mass consent in multiple modes.

Second, where prestige bespeaks hierarchy – socio-cultural relations that are vertically organised and that gather authority partly through the fabrication of time as 'tradition' – hegemony is both more opportunistic and more pragmatic: its vector is horizontal rather than vertical, addressed to the politics of the possible. The drama of Gramsci's own refunctioning of the term 'hegemony' (*egemonia*) itself testifies to this 'flexibility'. Originally a Greek word denoting the political and military domination of one city-state by another, the concept took on critical mass in European political consciousness in the turbulence of the mid-nineteenth century, before being consolidated in Marxist political theory in the first two decades of the twentieth. In these latter usages, it continued to refer to political domination, although now more generally of one class over another than of one state over another. Thus in a 1924 essay in *Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci cited Lenin's usage of the concept to refer to the domination or leadership of the political party of the working-class in the transformation to communism (the so-called 'dictatorship of the proletariat'). But Gramsci himself was interested in elaborating an expanded concept, one no longer 'limited to matters of direct political control' – Williams' words – 'but seek[ing] to describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships'.[38] He deployed the term 'hegemony' in the elaboration of this expanded concept: as Rosiello puts it, 'the term "hegemony"… offers to Gramsci the possibility [of using]… a wider and more comprehensive concept [than that] used by Soviet militant Marxism… At some point, Gramsci inserts the concept of "prestige" into the "theoretico-practical principle of hegemony," partly modifying its concept, thus making the sphere of its applicability larger'.[39]

The move from prestige to hegemony allows Gramsci to emphasise the plasticity of cultural forms – languages, discourses, generic narratives, formal devices, etc. – both in their mediation between the general and the particular and in their migration across time and space. His prison writings demonstrate an extraordinary sensitivity to the contingency, relative autonomy and irreducibility of cultural forms and developments; but this attention to particularity never causes him to abandon his fidelity to a deterministic and properly materialist explanatory schema. The commentary on language in the prison notebooks succeeds, as Rosiello has noted, in establishing 'an explicative relationship between the history of language and the history of the organization of… Italian culture'.[40] Thus the following passage, for instance (quoted by Rosiello), in which the complex and intersecting relations between language, culture and society are very suggestively elaborated:

The growth of the communes propelled the development of the vernaculars, and the intellectual hegemony of Florence consolidated it; that is, it created an illustrious vernacular. But what is this illustrious vernacular? It is the Florentine [dialect] developed by the intellectuals of the old tradition: the vocabulary as well as the phonetics are Florentine, but the syntax is Latin. The victory of the vernacular over the Latin was not easy, however: with the exception of poets and artists in general, learned Italians wrote for Christian Europe not for Italy; they were a compact group of cosmopolitan and not national intellectuals. The fall of the communes and the advent of the principality, the creation of a governing caste detached from the people, crystallized this vernacular in the same way literary Latin had been crystallized. Italian became,

once again, a written and not a spoken language, belonging to the learned, not to the nation.[41]

VI. *Translation and translatability*

In all these considerations, Gramsci is concerned with tracking cultural forms as they move across time and place. However, this is a concern less with *translation* than with *translatability*, for he is interested less in the conversion or rendering of words, texts, concepts, etc. from one language to another, than in the evaluation of how paradigms generated within one particular semio-ideological system might be transferred to another. In explaining the difference between 'translation' (*traduzione*) and 'translatability' (*traducibilità*), Boothman tells us that Carl Marzani, the first translator of a selection from Gramsci's prison writings into English, 'went so far as to deny that Gramsci's use of the term "translate" had a great deal to do with what translators do in practice'. Boothman quotes Marzani as suggesting that Gramsci's notion of 'translation' is closer to 'transposition', to the finding of 'correspondence or differentiations among the "idioms" of various countries' – 'idioms' for Marzani being 'the cultural ensemble, the ways of thinking and acting in a country at a given time' ('Translation', p. 108). Boothman refers us in this context to a moment in the prison writings in which Gramsci recalls Lenin's frustration at the fact that it was proving so difficult to repeat the Bolshevik revolutionary experience in other European contexts. 'Vilich [Lenin], in dealing with organizational questions, wrote and said (more or less) this', Gramsci observes: 'we have not been able to "translate" our language into those of Europe'. Boothman adds that 'Lenin went on to say, in a comment not recalled by Gramsci, "We have not learnt how to present

our Russian experience to foreigners"' ('Translation, p. 109).[42] In Gramsci's formulation,
'translate' is clearly not being used to refer to 'the act of re-expressing concepts in another
natural language'. The term is deployed rather 'in a broad and metaphorical sense';
moreover, 'the word "language" itself is used to indicate the culture of a given country'
('Translation', p. 109).

Consider two other occasions in which Gramsci uses the concept of 'translation' to specify an
activity quite different from what is conventionally meant by this term in literary studies. The
first of these is perhaps the simpler. At one point in his commentary on the Risorgimento in
the prison notebooks, Gramsci reflects on the relative failure of the progressive nineteenth-
century intellectual, Ferrari, to make his mark on Italian politics after his return to Italy in
1859, after more than twenty years in exile in France. Gramsci sees Ferrari's failure to make
himself integral to the contemporary politics of transformism as a failure of *translation*.
'Ferrari was to a great extent outside the concrete reality of Italy', he writes:

> he had become too gallicised. Often his judgements appear more acute than they really
> are, since he applied to Italy French schemas, which represented conditions
> considerably more advanced than those to be found in Italy… The politician… must be
> an effective man of action, working on the present. Ferrari did not see that an
> intermediary link was missing between the Italian and French situations, and that it was
> precisely this link which had to be welded fast for it to be possible to pass on to the next.
> Ferrari was incapable of 'translating' what was French into something Italian, and hence

his very 'acuteness' became an element of confusion, stimulated new sects and little schools, but did not impinge on the real movement (*SPN*, p. 65).

The suggestion here is that after his long years in exile, Ferrari was unable to put his finger on the pulse of Italian social life when he returned to Italy: the Italian 'cultural ensemble' continued to elude him, despite his best efforts to locate it.[43] Rather than being unable to translate his French experience to Italians (which would be to apply Lenin's formulation directly), it was rather a case of his being unable to make his Italian compatriots see that what he had learned and witnessed in France bore concrete implications for their situation also.

The second occasion introduces a much more complex, but also much more consequential, conception of 'translation'. Discussing what he calls 'the translatability of scientific languages' (*Traducibilità dei linguaggi scientifici*), Gramsci makes clear that what he is centrally concerned with are

> the relationships between speculative philosophies and the philosophy of praxis and their reduction to this latter as a political moment that the philosophy of praxis explains 'politically'. Reduction of all speculative philosophies to politics', to a moment of historico-political life; the philosophy of praxis conceives the reality of human relationships of knowledge as an element of political 'hegemony' (*FS*, p. 450).

In a related comment, he notes that

> The philosophy of praxis 'absorbs' the subjective conception of reality (idealism) into the theory of the superstructures; it absorbs and explains it historically, that is to say it 'goes beyond' it reducing it to one of its own 'moments'. The theory of the superstructures is

37

the translation in terms of realist historicism of the subjective conception of reality' (*FS*, p. 450).

Here 'translation' entails not so much the transfer of meaning or semantic expression from one language to another as the *transubstantiation of paradigmatic discourse* from one form (speculative philosophy, to take the example that Gramsci uses) to another (politics, or historico-political life). 'The radical form of translation', as Frosini observes, 'that is, the one that makes possible all other translations, is the translation of philosophy into politics' (p. 171).

This helps to explain what Gramsci would have had in mind in drawing our attention to the fact that both Kant and Croce believed that there needed to be 'agreement' between their philosophies and common sense – in other words, that their philosophies ought to represent *translations* of common sense – and that Marx asserted in *The Holy Family* that 'the political formulae of the French Revolution can be reduced to the principles of classical German philosophy' (*SPN*, p. 199). Gramsci also quoted the concluding lines of Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*: 'The German working-class movement is the inheritor of German classical philosophy',[44] proceeding then to the following speculation: 'How is the statement that the German proletariat is the heir of classical German philosophy to be understood? Surely what Marx [*sic*] wanted to indicate was the historical function of his philosophy when it became the theory of a class which was in turn to become a State?' (*SPN*, p. 381).

Between 'the "spontaneous" feelings of the masses' and Marxist theory there can be no opposition, Gramsci believed, because these 'spontaneous feelings' and 'theory' are both expressions of the same thing, both representations of the same underlying reality, and are to be understood, hence, as reciprocal *translations* of each other.[45] 'Between the two there is a "quantitative" difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal "reduction" so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible' (*SPN*, p. 199). Gramsci's focus thus devolves to a consideration of the social conditions of possibility of translation – a consideration of what makes it possible for one paradigmatic discourse to become translatable into another – it being recognised that 'translatability' is not an abstract given, but rather an historically determined and historically specific *possibility*. Gramsci considered language – and translation also – to be as much a constitutive element of hegemony as any other cultural instance. We are reminded to a certain extent of Benedict Anderson's suggestion that 'nation-ness' is a cultural artefact that becomes translatable – or, as he puts it, available for pirating – only at a particular historical moment: 'My point of departure', he writes in *Imagined Communities*,

> Is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. to understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that,

once created, they became 'modular', capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to mere and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations (p. 4).

So too with Gramsci. Starting with the idea that what matters in translation is not merely a question of 'translating terms and concepts belonging to the same subject matter, but… of… recognizing that two different subjects, [for instance] political theory and economics, can have fundamentally equivalent postulates, can be mutually comparable and in consequence can be reciprocally translatable' (Boothman, p. 112), he turns his attention to the structural conditions that engender this 'equivalence' (and hence its reciprocal translation). His explanation is phrased in terms of the concepts of universal and particular, base and superstructure, in their specifically Marxist formulation:

> Translatability presupposes that a given stage of civilization has a 'basically' identical cultural expression, even if its language is historically different, being determined by the particular tradition of each national culture and each philosophical system, by the prevalence of an intellectual or practical activity etc. Thus it is to be seen whether one can translate between expressions of different stages of civilization, in so far as each of these stages is a moment of the development of another, one thus mutually integrating the other, or whether a given expression may be translated using the terms of a previous stage of the same civilization, a previous stage which however is more comprehensible than the given language… (*FS*, p. 451).

'What follows from this', as Frosini correctly points out, is the relativisation of diverse languages [*linguaggi*] and (given the unity of theory and practice) a clarification of their uniquely political character' (p. 175). But it is Maas' gloss that seems most important for the argument we are trying to make in this paper:

> Gramsci always says that language belongs together with the life-form *organically*, that every language [*linguaggio*] 'contains the elements of a conception of the world and a culture'. With that, however, language represents at the same time a *limitation* of praxis, which is to be overcome through educational work in the perspective of its universalization. Universal in this sense, however, does not mean *formally* the same for all. The development of a national language is the development and sublation of particularism even if in national form: this remains related to the family of dialects that 'dwell' under its roof; the local limitations will be overcome, without however losing the ground of the lived experiences. Culture is for Gramsci in this sense linked to linguistic translatability, which for him, to a certain extent, by definition only occurs between national languages, related to the universal contents that are articulated in culturally specific forms. For the dialects, as symbolic expression of particular cultural praxes, that is excluded (Maas, p. 88).

We return here to the idea of *combined and uneven development*. What makes one particular paradigmatic discourse translatable into another is their mutual (but differentiated) location in a (world-) system marked by imbalance, competition, violence, and the struggle for hegemony. The idea of 'combined unevenness' then allows us to interpret the entwining of different locations, following the cartography of capital, in terms of patterns of

'interference'.[46]

Conclusion

Gramsci did not linger long on the standard idea of translation as the encoding of meaning into a new language. *Translatability* was what interested him, and it was a political activity that involved pirating, modularisation, appropriation, refunctioning, etc. Everyone interested in translatability must consider what it is that makes a text able to function for different audiences. This is the search for experiential, more than merely linguistic, equivalents. '[F]rom a practical point of view, the advancement of culture is much better served by the type of contributor… who knows how to translate a cultural world into the discourse [*linguaggio*] of another cultural world; someone who can discover similarities even when none are apparent and can find differences even where everything appears to be similar, etc.' (qtd. in Frosini, p. 177) Gramsci's emphasis is on the utility of the message, not the prestige of the journal or the skill of the translator himself or herself (Frosini, p. 178). Works have translatability only when different groups have 'a "basically" identical cultural expression, even if its language is historically different' (*FS*, p. 307). If prestige is sometimes a necessary element in the formation of social movements, it is never a sufficient one – as Gramsci shows in his discussion of the failure of Renaissance Humanism to translate itself into the 'language' of the national-popular in Italy.

The concept of 'translatability' downplays the emphases on aesthetic genius and the uniqueness and incommensurability of literary language, which have been – and remain –

central to the prevailing forms of comparativism in literary scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It also obviates anxiety that the transportation of cultural forms or paradigmatic discourses from one language to another either devalues the source language or appears as a degraded copy in the target language. What the concept of translatability seeks to highlight are the conditions that have to be in place for effective translation to take place. Just because cultural works are translated from one language to another does not mean they will have any actual impact, regardless of the prestige of their original creator or environment. For instance, the translation of Dumas into Italian does not make Dumas automatically powerful. Dumas' writing achieves significance because his concerns have translatability, in that they help explain and represent the experiences of Italian readers. These readers are not necessarily 'colonised' by a sense of cultural inferiority, even while they are allowing themselves to be 'led' by the prior century's French writers. Unless a work has translatability, resonates with the experience of a readership, it will have little impact, or find little acclaim. As Creswell poignantly observes, in a discussion of the barriers surrounding the translation from Arabic into English, 'I suggest that a central task of translators from the Arabic is to assert the bare translatability of the language into English. By translatability, I mean its interpretability, its potential for making sense – including, of course, aesthetic sense' (pp. 452-3).

No matter how well meaning the call by liberal translation studies scholars for more works to be translated, the mere existence of more translations will not necessarily have any substantive effect. For orthodox translation studies rests on a fetishism of language, a semiotic

essentialism, that imagines that language or word-forms matter intrinsically, when, in fact, these are merely means through which social experiences are carried: it is as social experiences that they are received, promoted, stifled, or countered by the dominant social institutions – media, schools and universities, publishers, etc. Rosiello cites Gramsci's critique of Bertoni, who had collaborated with Gramsci's teacher, Bartoli, in writing the *Breviario di Linguistica* in 1925. Bertoni, Gramsci says, 'reduces linguistics to an aesthetics of words, assuming language [*lingua*] and its innovations as spiritually and individually created facts'; Bartoli, by contrast, 'sets out heuristic methods and criteria that postulate and study language in its objectively definable historical and geographical organization' (qtd. Rosiello, p. 35). There is, consequently, no such thing as 'the translation zone',[47] even though there is very clearly a *social cartography of translatability*. The geography of translatability is the cultural topography of the capitalist world-system, its geoculture. The rationale for Gramsci's analysis lay in his understanding that events in Lenin's Russia – no matter how significant was their prestige for Marxist theory – could neither parthogenetically create revolution in Italy, nor be taken as a fixed template. The ratios of the interaction between countryside and city in the two nations might have been comparable, but they were different, not least insofar as Italy had a much broader industrialised North and greater fraction of the entire country than was the case with Russia.

A turn from translation studies, cemented by philological concerns, to translatability studies, grounded in the history of social relations, would provide a new perspective on literary history and the role played by narrative, device, genre, etc. Think, for example, of the

'translatability' of the slogans '*Liberté*, *Egalité*, *Fraternité*' or 'We, the people' – the translatability of nationalism or of Marxism itself, for that matter. 'The fundamental question here', as Renault writes in a commentary on Fanon and Tran Du Thao,

> is that of the modalities of what Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, calls the 'translatability of scientific and philosophical languages'. Gramsci takes a double view: on the one hand, Marxism is a universal metalanguage which allows for the mutual translation of particular non- or pre-Marxian languages – as demonstrated by Marx's own translations of German (Hegelian) philosophy, French socialism and English political economy; on the other hand, Marxism is itself a body of thought and practice that ought to be translated from language to language, from nation to nation, in the West and beyond it (p. 118).

Our choice of texts to study, our selective tradition, ought in these terms to be governed not by survival in the marketplace – since that is ultimately a study of the marketplace's supply and demand in search of price equilibrium – but by the ways in which a genre or device seems to allow for the fusion of compound, multiple interests. The latter is a search for the values in contention. Moretti's focus on readership, sales and Darwinian logics of survival seems to us to risk capitulation to the philosophy of prices, rather than values, a granting of social truths according to the spheres of consumption rather than production and social reproduction of class relations. 'If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture', as Gramsci himself puts it,

> it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conception of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or

understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the other major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economistic, not universal. While it is not always possible to learn a number of foreign languages in order to put oneself in contact with other cultural lives, it is at the least necessary to learn the national language properly. A great culture can be translated into the language of another great culture, that is to say a great national language with historic richness and complexity, and it can translate any other great culture and can be a world-wide means of expression. But a dialect cannot do this' [*SPN*, p. 325].

What is required, we might then say, is the translation, not of Balzac into Italian, nor even of Marx into Italian, but of the conditions that underpin French politics, German philosophy and British economics into Italian. And this is a matter not of intellectual work, no matter how progressive, but of practical politics.

Stephen Shapiro and Neil Lazarus

University of Warwick

Works Cited

Allinson, Jamie C. and Alexander Anievas. 'The Uses and Misuses of Uneven and Combined Development: An Anatomy of a Concept'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22.1 (2009), pp.47-67.

--------. 'The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity'. *Capital & Class* 34.3 (2010), pp. 469-90.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

Anderson, Perry. *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2017).

--------. *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Verso, 2017)

Apter, Emily. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Ascari, Maurizio. 'The Dangers of Distant Reading: Reassessing Moretti's Approach to Literary Genres'. *Genre* 47.1 (2014): 1-19.

Ashman, S. 'Capitalism, Uneven and Combined Development and the Transhistoric'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22.1 (2009), pp. 29-46.

Barker, Colin. 'Beyond Trotsky: Extending Combined and Uneven Development'. *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*. Eds. Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (London: Pluto, 2006), pp. 78-87.

Batuman, Elif. 'Adventures of a Man of Science: Moretti in California'. *N+13* (2005). nplusonemag.com/adventures-men-science.

Benjamin, Walter. 'On the Concept of History'. Trans. Harry Zohn. *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4: 1938-1940. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389-411.

Bonfante, Giuliano. 'The Neolinguistic Position (A Reply to Hall's Criticism of Neolinguistics)'. *Language* 23.4 (1947), pp. 344-75.

Boothman, Derek. 'Translation and Translatability: Renewal of the Marxist Paradigm'. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 107-34.

Brennan, Timothy. 'Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory: 'Southernism''. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10.2 (2001), pp. 143-87.

Brown, Nicholas. *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Carlucci, Alessandro. *Gramsci and Languages: Unification, Diversity, Hegemony* (Amsterdam: Brill [Historical Materialism Book Series], 2013).

Cleary, Joe. The World Literary System: Atlas and Epitaph'. *Field Day Review* 2 (2006), pp. 197-219.

--------. 'Realism after Modernism and the Literary World-System'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012), pp. 255-68.

Creswell, Robyn. 'Is Arabic Untranslatable?' *Public Culture* 28.3 (2016): 447-56.

Davidson, Neil. 'Uneven and Combined Development: Modernity, Modernism, Revolution'. *rs21*: https://rs21.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/uneven-and-combined-development-modernity-modernism-revolution.pdf;

De Mauro, Tullio. 'Language from Nature to History: More on Gramsci the Linguist'. Trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 51-62.

Denning, Michael. *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso 2015).

Engels, Frederick [Friedrich]. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976).

Esty, Jed. 'Global Lukács'. *Novel* 42.3 (2009), pp. 366-72.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. 'Laws of Literary Interference'. *Poetics Today* 11.1 (1990): 53-72

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

Frosini, Fabio. 'On "Translatability" in Gramsci's _Prison Notebooks_'. Trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 171-86.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Ed. and trans.

Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

--------. *Quaderni del Carcere*. Vol. 2 (*Quaderni* 6-11). Edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci. Ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1977).

--------. *Selections from Cultural Writings*. Eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Trans. William Boelhower (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985).

--------. *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (London: Elecbook, 1999. Transcribed from earlier edition, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

--------. *Prison Notebooks*. Vol. II. Ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Ives, Peter. *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004).

--------. *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

--------. 'The Mammoth Task of Translating Gramsci'. *Rethinking Marxism* 18.1 (2006), pp. 15-22.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

--------. 'Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012), pp. 475-85.

Jennison, Ruth. *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Lacorte, Rocco. 'Translatability, Language and Freedom in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*'. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 213-23.

Lo Piparo, Franco. 'The Linguistic Roots of Gramsci's Non-Marxism'. Trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 19-28.

Löwy, Michael. 'The Current of Critical Irrealism: "A moonlit enchanted night"'. *Adventures in Realism*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 193-206.

--------. *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2010).

Maas, Utz. 'Gramsci the Linguist'. Trans. Peter Thomas. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 81-99.

Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1984).

McKay, Ian G. 'Our Awkward Ancestors: Trotsky, Gramsci and the Challenge of Reconnaissance'. *Capital and Class* 34.3 (2010): 509-30.

Moretti, Franco. *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* [1994]. Trans. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1996).

--------. 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature'. *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000), pp. 207-27.

--------. 'More Conjectures'. *New Left Review* 20 (2003), pp. 73-81.

--------. 'Conjectures on World Literature' [2000]. *Debating World Literature*. Ed. Christopher Prendergast (London and New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 148-62.

--------. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

--------. 'World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, *Weltliteratur*'. *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*. Eds. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 67-77.

Niblett, Michael. 'World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature'. *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 16 (2012), pp. 15-30.

Prendergast, Christopher. 'Evolution and Literary History: A Response to Franco Moretti'. *New Left Review* 34 (2005): 40-62.

Renault, Matthieu. 'Fanon and Tran Du Thao: The Making of French Anticolonialism'. *Nottingham French Studies* 54.1 (2015): 107-18.

Rosenberg, Justin. 'Globalization Theory: A Post-Mortem'. *International Politics* 42.1 (2005), pp. 2-74.

--------. 'International Relations: the "Higher Bullshit": A Reply to the Globalisation Theory Debate'. *International Politics* 44.4 (2007), pp. 450-82.

Rosengarten, Frank. 'The Gramsci-Trotsky Question (1922-1932)'. *Social Text* 11 (1985), pp. 65-

95. Reprinted in *The Revolutionary Marxism of Antonio Gramsci* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 15-44.

Rosiello, Luigi. 'Linguistics and Marxism in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci'. Trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives. *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 29-50.

Saccarelli, Emanuele. *Gramsci and Trotsky in the Shadow of Stalinism: The Political Theory and Practice of Opposition* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Sassoon, Donald. *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present*. London: HarperCollins, 2006.

Shapiro, Stephen. 'Zombie Health Care'. *The Year's Work at the Zombie Research Center*. Eds. Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014): 193-226.

-------- and Philip Barnard. *Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles and World-Systems Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Smith, Neil. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Thibault, Paul J. *Re-reading Saussure: The Dynamics of Signs in Social Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Thomas, Peter D. *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2009).

Trotsky, Leon. *History of the Russian Revolution* [1932-33]. Vol. 1. Trans. Max Eastman (London: Sphere Books, 1967).

Williams, Raymond. 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory'. *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980): 31-49.

--------. *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

--------. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

--------. *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

--------. 'Notes on English Prose 1780-1950'. *Writing in Society* (London and New York: Verso,

1991): 67-118.

Woodfin, Fabiana. 'Lost in Translation: The Distortion of *Egemonia*'. *Marxism and Cultural Studies*. Eds. Lee Artz, Steve Macek and Dana L. Cloud (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 133-56.

WReC (Warwick Research Collective). *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

Notes

[1] We would like to thank our two anonymous reviewers at *Mediations* for their exceptionally thoughtful comments. We've tried to incorporate their suggestions where we thought we could, without making an already lengthy essay longer still.

[2] We say 'recent', but Lo Piparo's *Lingua, Intellettuali e Egemonia in Gramsci* [Language, Intellectuals and Hegemony in Gramsci] was published as early as 1979. As Ives and Lacorte point out in their editors' Introduction to *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, Lo Piparo's work made it 'incontrovertible that [Gramsci's]… linguistic studies were central to his well known conception of hegemony and his entire approach to political language' (p. 2). But they also note that '[w]hile Lo Piparo's book became *the* work cited on Gramsci and language no part of it has ever been translated'. See the essays in the Ives and Lacorte volume by Lo Piparo himself, Rosiello, De Mauro, Maas, Boothman, Frosini, and Lacorte; and also Carlucci, *Gramsci and Languages*; Ives, *Gramsci's Politics of Language*, 'The Mammoth Task', and *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*; Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*; Woodfin, 'Lost in Translation'. Anderson's *The H-Word* and *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* appeared too late for us to be able to do more than gesture to them in this essay.

[3] Our own contributions to this emergent discussion appear in WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development*. See also, *inter alia*, Brown, *Utopian Generations*; Cleary, 'The World Literary System' and 'Realism after Modernism'; Esty, 'Global Lukács'; Jameson, 'Antinomies'; Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era*; Löwy, 'Critical Irrealism'; Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 'Conjectures', 'More Conjectures', and *Graphs, Maps, Trees*; Niblett, 'World-Economy'; Shapiro and Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*.

[4] Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 432. Among the recent commentaries on 'combined and uneven development' that we have found most useful are Allinson and Anievas, 'The Uses and Misuses of Uneven and Combined Development'; Ashman, 'Capitalism, Uneven and Combined Development'; Barker, 'Beyond Trotsky'; Davidson, 'Uneven and Combined Development'; Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*; Rosenberg, 'Globalization Theory' and 'International Relations'; Smith, *Uneven Development*.

[5] Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, p. 35.

[6] The standard reference here is Rosengarten, 'The Gramsci-Trotsky Question'. Saccarelli's *Gramsci and Trotsky in the Shadow of Stalinism* is tendentious and unreliable. Its myriad inaccuracies and misrepresentations are deftly (and wittily) skewered by McKay, 'Our Awkward Ancestors'. See also Allinson and Anievas, 'The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration', which combines Trotsky's and Gramsci's ideas in an informed and suggestive reading of the material conditions of possibility of the Japanese 'take-off' in the latter half of the 19th century.

[7] See Brennan, 'Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory', for an interesting discussion of 'Southernism'. Concerning 'the language question', Ives writes as follows: 'Together with the Southern Question one of the significant problems facing the newly unified Italy in 1861 was its practical lack of a "standard" language. It is estimated that in 1861, only somewhere between two and a half and twelve per cent of the new Italian population spoke anything that could be called "standard" Italian. In other words, the very existence of Italian as a spoken language of daily life was questionable. Literary Italian was primarily a written language of the elite. It was not used by large numbers of people. The spoken languages of "Italian" were more like a family of Latin dialects with greater and lesser influences from other languages such as the pre-Roman Etruscan, French, Spanish and German. Sardinian was particularly distant from literary Italian. Added to this lack of a "standard

Italian" was the very high illiteracy rate of about 75 per cent throughout Italy. The *questione della lingua*, or the "Language Question" is connected to the Southern Question, as exhibited by the fact that in Sardinia the illiteracy rate was 90 per cent (*Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, p. 36).

[8] Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, p. 208. Further references to this collection (henceforth *SCW*) will be given in the body of our essay.

[9] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', pp. 389-411.

[10] Moretti, 'World-Systems Analysis', pp. 70-1.

[11] Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans*, p. 483. Further references to this study (henceforth *Europeans*) will be given in the body of our essay.

[12] Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, p. 15.

[13] Boothman suggests that what is involved here is best thought of not as 'appropriation' but as 'translation': Gramsci 'sees the possibility of translating [Croce's speculative philosophy]… into the terms of [the philosophy of praxis]…' he argues – 'and an important part of the polemic with Croce is in fact Gramsci's critique and then *translation* of Crocean concepts, purged of their idealist content, into his own philosophically realist and materialist paradigm'. 'Translation and Translatability', p. 109. Further references to this essay (henceforth 'Translation') will be given in the body of our essay. We will return to the questions of 'translation' and 'translatability' below.

[14] In the Italian original: '*esse sono generate, no per "partenogenesi" ma per l'intervento dell'elemento "maschile" – la storia – l'attività rivoluzionaria che crea il "nuovo uomo", cioè nuovi rapport sociali*' (*Quaderni* 6 §64, p. 733).

[15] Even-Zohar, 'Laws of Literary Interference', p. 53. Further references to this article (henceforth 'Laws') will be given in the body of our essay.

[16] The interest in 'innovation' is long-standing in Gramsci – dating back, as De Mauro tells us, to his 'glottological studies at the school of Matteo Bartoli' in Turin from 1911 onwards: 'Bartoli made Gramsci study the processes of innovation and consolidation of linguistic innovations, the linguistic repercussions of innovative centers' socioeconomic, cultural and political prestige, and traditional German, French and, in Italy, Ascoli's historical linguistics'. 'Language from Nature to History', p. 53.

[17] One of the clearest general examples of cultural 'interference' by imposition is provided by modern European colonialism. Hence Fanon's famous description of the cataclysmic effects of colonial conquest and domination: 'Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him'. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 110.

[18] Williams is particularly sensitive to this emphasis in Gramsci's work: see his commentary on the categories of 'dominant, residual, and emergent' in *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 121-7. 'In authentic historical analysis', he writes, 'it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance. It is necessary to examine how these relate to the whole cultural process rather than only to the selected and abstracted dominant system' (p. 121); see also Shapiro, 'Zombie Health Care'.

[19] The phrase is Pirandello's, qtd. *SCW*, p. 146.

[20] Compare Jameson, who writes that 'One of the concerns frequently aroused by periodizing hypotheses is that these tend to obliterate difference, and to project an idea of the historical period as a massive homogeneity (bounded on either side by inexplicable "chronological" metamorphoses and punctuation marks)'. *Postmodernism*, pp. 3-4.

[21] Gramsci bids us to contrast the plays 'conceived in dialect' with 'those conceived in literary language where a supradialectal life of national and even cosmopolitan bourgeois intellectuals is depicted'. And he continues: 'Now, it seems that in the dialect plays Pirandellism is justified by ways of thinking which are "historically" popular and folkish, dialectal. We do not, in other words, seem to have "intellectuals" disguised as common people, common people who think like intellectuals, but a historically and regionally real Sicilian people who think and act the way they do precisely because they are common people and Sicilians… Just because they cannot be familiar with the subjectivist philosophy of modern idealism does not mean that there can be no "dialectical" and immanentist currents in the popular tradition. If this were demonstrated, the whole castle of Pirandellism, the abstract intellectualism of Pirandello's plays, would collapse, as it appears it must' (*SCW*, p. 141).

[22] Moretti, 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', p. 209. Further references to this article (henceforth 'Slaugherhouse') will be given in the body of our essay.

[23] Cf. Williams's proposition that works of art be thought about not as *objects* but as *notations*: 'These notations have then to be interpreted in an active way, according to the particular conventions… The relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organization and relationship… [W]e have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary, we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions'. 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', p. 47.

[24] See also Williams, again: 'To see individuation as a social process is to set limits to the isolation but also perhaps to the autonomy of the individual author. To see form as formative has a similar effect. The familiar question in literary history, "what did this author do to this form?" is often reversed, becoming "what did this form do to this author?"' *Marxism and Literature*, p. 192.

[25] See the suggestive critical readings put forward by Ascari, 'The Dangers of Distant Reading'; Batuman, 'Adventures of a Man of Science'; and Prendergast, 'Evolution and Literary History', among others. Ascari's conclusion is worth quoting here: 'The idea that a single "device" – clues – may be identified as the factor that ensured the immediate success and the subsequent survival of late nineteenth-century detective stories is outdated. Only four of the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes stories present visible clues simply because this was not the defining feature of the Holmes formula. Moretti has accepted as objective a view of detective fiction that crystallized in the first half of the twentieth century as the result of precise cultural conditions and that has since then been increasingly called into question by specialists' ('The Dangers of Distant Reading', p. 15).

[26] Williams, 'Notes on English Prose 1780-1950', p. 91.

[27] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 154.

[28] In their editorial notes to *SCW*, Forgacs and Nowell-Smith explain that '[t]he "contentists" argued that the new period should be expressed with a new subject matter', while 'the "calligraphists" (in effect formalists) retorted that form was also content so that they too were producing a historically new content by working on form' (p. 90). Forgacs and Nowell-Smith go on to say that for Gramsci, 'the debate was little more than a gang war between two literary coteries bent on defending their respective territories. It reflected the cultural immobility of two kinds of traditional literary intellectual. The "contentists" rallied a more militant type who wanted to see the

"new mentality" and "revolutionary" thrust of fascism expressed in literature. The "calligraphists" exemplified an attitude of aloofness from politics and a defence of "pure" literary values and the national tradition' (pp. 90-1).

[29] It is worthwhile to reflect for a moment on the cultural specificity of the 'contentist'/'calligraphist' dispute, whose historical context is that of the emergence of fascism in the relatively backward and significantly unevenly developed social landscape – the semi-peripherality – of Italy in the early 1930s. In the Anglophone literary sphere, by contrast, T.S. Eliot's socially reactionary diagnosis of a 'dissociation of sensibility' leads him not to a calligraphist solution – a retreat into the 17th century forms that he so admired and whose moral and intellectual world he so celebrated – but, on the contrary, to a radical modernist formal experimentalism. For Eliot, Pound, Lewis and others of their intellectual formation, the idea of 'making it new' was not associated, as it was for their conservative Italian counterparts, with the threat of a geo-politically mandated over-determination of the local (or 'national') culture from without.

[30] Saussure's differences from the neo-grammarians are discussed by Thibault, *Re-reading Saussure*. See especially p. 80ff.

[31] Bonfante, 'The Neolinguistic Position', pp. 347-8.

[32] Maas, 'Gramsci the Linguist', p. 86. Maas quotes from an article by Gramsci that appeared in *Avanti!* in 1918. English translation in *SCW*, p. 30 (it is misattributed as p. 29 in Maas).

[33] Bonfante, 'The Neolinguistic Position', p. 347.

[34] Lo Piparo, 'The Linguistic Roots', p. 25.

[35] Sassoon himself makes clear that the 'nationalisation' of Tuscan was anything but an organic process. See also Maas, who points out that, both because '[l]inguistic relations in Italy are distinguished by the extreme dialectal oppositions between north and south' and because of the social (specifically class-related) implications of the historical predominance of Dante's Florentine dialect – which meant among other things that, from Dante's own time in the fourteenth century until Italian unification in the nineteenth, an overwhelming majority of Italians did not speak 'Italian' – Tuscan served as much to block the development of national consciousness in Italy as it did to promote it. '[I]n the wake of Dante and completely detached from the development of linguistic relations', Maas notes, 'the prestige-charged Tuscan literary dialect… functions as an additional factor hindering a national development, because reference to it explicitly excluded the real social centers of Rome and the north Italian industrial zones from the high cultural horizon. This confused cultural situation correlated with one of the highest rates of illiteracy in Europe' ('Gramsci the Linguist', pp. 84-5).

[36] Lo Piparo, 'The Linguistic Roots', p. 25.

[37] See the report on a 2004 poll, commissioned by the BBC to canvass the views of the British public on accents and languages: http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/poll_results.shtml . Accessed 28th March 2016.

[38] Williams, *Keywords*, p. 118. See also Anderson's recent *The H-Word*.

[39] Rosiello, 'Linguistics and Marxism', p. 38.

[40] Ibid., p. 42.

[41] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Vol. II, pp. 73-4. (Quoted in Rosiello, op. cit., p. 41.)

[42] The citation from Gramsci is from *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 450-1. Further references to this volume (FS) will be given in the body of our essay.

[43] In their editorial notes to *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Hoare and Nowell Smith explain that Ferrari remained 'active in parliamentary politics until his death [in 1876]', but 'as a more or less isolated radical figure who stood outside the process of transformism which characterized Italian parliamentary life in those years' (p. 65 n.23). Further references to this volume (*SPN*) will be given in the body of our essay.

[44] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, p. 60.

[45] Concerning 'spontaneity' here, Gramsci wrote that the 'feelings of the masses' are '"spontaneous" in the sense that they are not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by "common sense", i.e., by the traditional popular conception of the world' (SPN, pp. 198-9).

[46] See Denning's *Noise Uprising*, which charts the emergence of musical forms in semiperipheral ports around the world, to which people from the peripheral hinterlands were drawn through the new infrastructures of fixed capital which largely serviced the commodity chains of extractive industries.

[47] Our reference here is to Emily Apter's book of this name, published in 2006.