

Zuccato on Buffoni's Coleridge

The other noteworthy recent translation is the work of Franco Buffoni, a renowned poet and a scholar of comparative literature. His perspective emerges already in the introduction to the volume, which takes up Luzi's ideas giving them a twist of his own. Coleridgean irrationality, as Buffoni calls it, is one of the two main trends of modern poetry, that of Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Surrealism etc; the other one was initiated by Wordsworth and is defined as lyric naturalism. Unlike Luzi, Buffoni sympathises with the latter rather than the former and its yearning for wholeness. He believes that the best poetry is to be found in fragments, and even *The Ancient Mariner* would be a better poem if it had remained unfinished. The last four sections are to him worse than the others. The poem is a romance story, which, as Northrop Frye taught us, is structurally endless; any conclusion is far-fetched and unconvincing. Coleridge's later poetic fragments atone for the artificial completeness of *The Ancient Mariner*.^[1]

Buffoni gave Italian readers the widest selection of Coleridge's poems, ranging from the great visionary poems to fragments on politics, metrics, psychology, aesthetics, dreams and family life. It is an original selection which anticipated the view embodied in the *Collected Coleridge*, whose editor, J. C. C. Mays, argued for the continuity of Coleridge's of poetical development rather than its traditional division into an early, great period followed by a later, minor phase from the *Dejection* ode onwards. As Buffoni noticed, Coleridge's later poems are excellent and they anticipate several poetic modes - from allegory to the imagistic fragment - which became central in the Victorian and Modernist periods. In his translations Buffoni was alert to the rhythms of the original rather than the metre, and he reproduced them in his versions. The best ones are those closer to his poetic manner, of everyday life and middle style, such as the fragment *The Singing Kettle* and the *Purring Cat*:

La teiera che fischia e le fusa del gatto;
Il respiro dolce del bambino in culla;
Il silenzio e, lucido d'amore, lo sguardo
Della madre: il suo sorriso
Che replica al sorriso del sonno.^[2]

Though respectable, his *Ancient Mariner* in Italian free verse is less convincing than the fragments:

Aveva labbra rosse ed occhi fieri,
I capelli biondi come l'oro,
Ma bianca la pelle da lebbrosa:
L'incubo VITA-IN-MORTE era,
Che raggela il sangue degli uomini.^[3]

References

- Coleridge S. T. (1972) *Coleridge's Verse: A Selection*, eds. David Pirie and William Empson, London: Faber & Faber.
- (1987b) *La ballata del vecchio marinaio e altre poesie*, ed. Franco Buffoni, pref. Franco Cordelli, Milan: Mondadori.
- (1996) *I poemi demoniaci*, ed. Marcello Pagnini, Florence: Giunti. Mays, James C. C. (2002) *The Later Poetry*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- From Edoardo Zuccato, *The Translation of Coleridge's Poetry and his Influence on Twentieth-Century Italian Poetry*, in *The Reception of S. T. Coleridge in Europe*, eds. Elinor Shaffer and E. Zuccato, Continuum, London 2007, pp. 197-212 [pp. 209-10]. Rptd. with permission of the publisher.

[1] The same ideas underlay the provocative anthology *Coleridge 1972*, in which Empson and Pirie did not include some parts of the major poems. J. C. C. Mays pointed out that the concept of later poetry is untenable, since Coleridge wrote poems in the manner of his late verse throughout his life (see Mays 2002). Buffoni was born in 1948.

[2] Coleridge 1987b, 133 (*The singing Kettle and the purring Cat, / The gentle breathing of the cradled Babe, / The silence of the Mother's love-bright eye, / And tender smile answering in smile of Sleep.*)

[3] Coleridge 1987b, 53-54 (ll. 190-94, *Her lips were red, her looks were free, / Her locks were yellow as gold: / Her skin was as white as leprosy, / The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she, / Who thicks man's blood with cold.*) This mode of translation, based on cadence and free verse rather than rhyme and metre, appears in other recent versions like Coleridge 1996.