

IN SEARCH OF EXAMPLES OF FOREIGNISATION IN THE WORK OF LAWRENCE VENUTI: A CASE STUDY  
BASED ON HIS TRANSLATION OF SOME POEMS BY ANTONIA POZZI.

The beginning of wisdom is in the expression  
from the Gospel: 'Judge Not' [André Gide]

### **Foreword**

This paper will consider some translations by Lawrence Venuti with the aim of highlighting possible inconsistencies between his practice as a translator and the theoretical concept of *foreignisation* popularized and advocated in his well-known book "The Translator's Invisibility" (Venuti 2008).

To this end, Venuti's translation of some poems written by Antonia Pozzi and published in the English collection *Breath* (2002) will be reviewed in search of examples of either *foreignisation* or *domestication*.

The overall question that will be addressed is the following: Is Venuti *the translator* consistent in his own translations with the theories advocated by his twin Venuti *the theoretician*? In the poems examined, does he actually apply *foreignisation*, the technique he fervently advocates?

Although the poems reviewed will include footnotes with comments on the translation choices taken by Venuti, the aim of this paper is by no means to question his skills as a translator, rather to point to possible discrepancies between his work as a *theorist* of translation studies and his *practice* as a translator. The footnotes, the alternative translations and the comments were merely added for the benefit of a public of non-native Italian speakers and to help prove the point.

For the purpose of this study, this 1928 quote from André Gide will always hold true:

In general, I deplore that spitefulness that tries to discredit a translation (perhaps excellent in other regards) because here and there slight mistranslations have slipped

in... It is always easy to alert the public against obvious errors, often mere trifles. The fundamental virtues are the hardest to appreciate and to point out. (André Gide, cited in Brower, 1966: 90)

## **Introduction**

This paper is composed of four main sections.

### **1. Definition of Foreignisation**

In the first section an introduction will be given to the concepts of foreignisation and domestication as presented by Lawrence Venuti, through comments and brief excerpts quoted from his works.

### **2. Reviews**

Some of Venuti's translations of the poems by Antonia Pozzi will then be reviewed, in search of examples of *foreignisation* or of *domestication*. An alternative translation will also be provided along with some detailed comments and footnotes. A note on the methodology used to review the poems will open this section.

### **3. Results**

Finally, the findings of the study will be presented, with references to the footnotes introduced in the previous section.

### **4. Conclusion**

Conclusions will provide some general remarks and wrap-up this brief study.

## **1. Definition of Foreignisation**

In the first chapter of “The Translator’s Invisibility”, Lawrence Venuti points to a translation strategy commonly adopted in the UK and the United States:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text. (Venuti 2008: 1)

In those countries, translations are considered as acceptable only if the translator remains *invisible* in the target text to give the reader the impression that they were originally written in that language (Venuti 2008: 1).

Venuti strongly contests this trend to grant primacy to these “invisible” translations, on the ground that:

- a. The target texts produced in such a way are not transparent but give just the “illusion” of being transparent or natural in the target language. (Venuti 2008: 5)
- b. By adopting such a strategy, translators remain hidden from society, which will tend to ignore their work and deprive them of any authorship rights. (Venuti 2008: 9)

For the purpose of this essay, I will **not** refer to Venuti’s *crusade* to help promote the role of translators in society (b), undoubtedly worthy of the uttermost praise and attention. Translators definitely deserve to receive more consideration: for far too long have they been considered just the last link down a long chain (Chan 2005). “The translator is therefore the holder of copyright in his or her translation and consequently has the same privileges as the author of the original work”, says the charter of the International Federation of Translators approved at Dubrovnik in 1963 (IFT 2008). Reality however is often rather different and translators are rarely credited in full for a task that is at the same time difficult and highly specialized.

Valery Larbaud is quoted by Brower as saying:

The translator is unappreciated; he is seated at the lowest position; he lives so to speak on alms; he is willing to perform the humblest functions and to play the most unobtrusive parts. “Be of service” is his motto, and he asks nothing for himself, priding himself of being faithful to his chosen masters, faithful even to the point of suppressing his own intellectual personality. (Brower, 1966: 78)

Given these discomfoting premises any endeavor to help strengthen the translator’s role in society can only be praised and encouraged.

What will be open to scrutiny in this paper will be something different, the tool advocated by Venuti to try to increase the visibility of translators and reduce their marginalization in society: the adoption of *foreignising* techniques.

To explain this concept Venuti himself quotes a well-known statement made by Schleiermacher in his 1813 essay "On the Different Methods of Translating". Schleiermacher argued that as far as the overall strategies employed in translation “there are only two possibilities. Either the translator (i) leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or (ii) he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.” (Schleiermacher, cited in Venuti 2008: 101).

The former (i) can be viewed as what is now commonly referred to as *foreignisation* and the latter (ii) as its opposite, *domestication*.

*Foreignisation*, therefore, implies an effort to preserve the culture of the source text, for example by employing calques in the target text for words that are peculiar to the source culture. *Domestication*, instead, will tend to adapt the source text to the target culture with the aim of making it easier to understand for foreign readers. In one case, (i) the translator is offering a helping hand to the author, in the other (ii) he is offering it to the reader<sup>1</sup>.

Needless to say for Venuti the panacea to all evils is *foreignisation*, that has the advantage of “preserving linguistic and cultural differences by deviating from prevailing domestic values”. (Baker 2008: 240) A foreignising approach is “highly desirable to restrain the ethnocentric violence

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<sup>1</sup> One may wonder, given that human beings are normally endowed with two hands, why the translator cannot offer a helping hand to both author and reader.

of translation” (Venuti 2008: 20) and “make the translated text a site where a cultural other is not erased but manifested” (Baker 2008: 242)

According to Venuti, a translation should never read as if it were an original, rather it should bear the visible signs of it being translated: "Fluency masks a domestication of the foreign text that is appropriative and potentially imperialistic (...) It can be countered by a *foreignising* translation that registers the irreducible differences of the foreign text". (Venuti 2004: 341)

Venuti, however, does not tell much about how to achieve foreignisation in practice. What would the translator actually have to do in order not to be “appropriative and potentially imperialistic”? What is required to preserve the “irreducible differences in the foreign text”? Since these questions are not addressed by Venuti himself I will not take the debate a step ahead and suggest that he may be calling for the wider adoption of formal equivalence to the detriment of dynamic equivalence. For the purpose of this study it will suffice to note that the examples of foreignisation considered here will be mainly *calques*.

Getting back to Venuti and to his translation of the poems of Antonia Pozzi the question we will ask is the following: is Lawrence Venuti consistent with his own manifesto? Does he himself as a translator follow the precepts that he has carefully laid down in his theoretical work by consistently employing foreignisation?

Before attempting to address these questions, however, let us have a brief look at the methodology employed in reviewing Venuti’s translations of the poems by Antonia Pozzi.

## **2. Reviews**

The written works of the great poets of the past are most certainly a way of getting in touch with their souls. If we were just to sit still, open our hearts and listen, those great men and women would speak to us as if standing right before us. This is certainly much easier to do with an empty mind, with no previous influences coming from others that may hinder this feeble flow that connects their energy to our own. For this reason when reviewing and translating the poems of Antonia Pozzi, I did not consult Venuti's translation notes nor any other previous English translation or critical work. I did, however, read the well written account of her sad life included in Appendix 1, very helpful in tuning in to what appears was an overly sensitive soul that lived in a world which was not ready to receive her. In Appendix 2, in the back cover of the book "Breath", you will find a picture of Antonia Pozzi that may be helpful to imagine the poet while she was writing her works or visiting the places described in them.

As to the reviews, they will be preceded by the source text and by the aligned target text with my translation and the one by Venuti. The overall layout used was based on the one adopted in the *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* (Darbelnet, J., & Vinay, 1995: 292-327) that entails the use of footnotes to refer to each specific part of a poem without obliging the reader to flip back and forth between different pages. The words or expressions that have been underlined mark the presence of examples of either foreignisation or domestication<sup>2</sup> which will be explained in detail in the footnotes and referred to in the last section of the paper where the results will be reported.

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<sup>2</sup> Given its brevity, this paper has focused mainly on *calques*, although it could have considered other less apparent examples of foreignisation, such as those involving the use of non idiomatic structures in the target language.

## Acqua alpina

Gioia di cantare come te, torrente;  
gioia di ridere  
sentendo nella bocca i denti  
bianchi come il tuo greto;  
gioia d'essere nata  
soltanto in un mattino di sole  
tra le viole  
di un pascolo;  
d'aver scordato la notte  
ed il morso dei ghiacci.

(Breil) Pasturo, 12 agosto 1933

ALIGNED ST (ITALIAN)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH)
<b>ACQUA <u>ALPINA</u></b> (A. POZZI)	<b>MOUNTAIN STREAM</b> (A. IACOVONI)	<b><u>ALPINE</u><sup>3</sup> WATER</b> (L. VENUTI)
i. Gioia di cantare con te, torrente	The joy of singing along with you, stream	The sheer <b>joy</b> <sup>4</sup> of singing like you, <b>torrential</b> <sup>5</sup>
ii. gioia di ridere	the joy of laughing	of laughing
iii. sentendo nella bocca i denti	with teeth in my mouth	& feeling the teeth in my mouth
iv. bianchi come il tuo greto;	white as the pebbles on your shore;	white like your gravely shore
v. gioia d'essere nata	the joy of being born	of being born <b>alone</b> <sup>6</sup>
vi. soltanto in un mattino di sole	just this one sunny morning	one sunlit morning
vii. tra le viole	among the violets	amidst violets
viii. di un pascolo;	of a pasture;	in the pasture;
ix. d'aver scordato la notte	untouched by night	forgetting night
x. ed il morso dei ghiacci	and bite of ice	the bite of the ice

**Comment:** This poem evokes the image of a lovely mountain stream [i], which fills the poet with joy and happiness [ii and v]. The poet expresses her desire to be born just that one sunny day [vi] untouched by the darkness of the night or by the bite of ice [ix-x], a metaphor that stands for the difficult moments in her life.

<sup>3</sup> It is debatable whether the title “Alpine” should be left unchanged in the target text. In my opinion it may distract the attention of readers from the universal beauty of nature described in the poem, that is the same everywhere, on the Alps, on the Himalaya or in our own backyards. Antonia Pozzi referred to those specific mountains and not to others because she knew them better since she came from the north of Italy, not far from the Alps.

<sup>4</sup> Venuti decided to elide the word “joy” in lines ii and v, possibly for a matter of style in English. It is certainly better to repeat it three times in the target text given that this sense of “joy” is what characterizes the entire poem.

<sup>5</sup> The source text refers to the Poet laughing “along with the torrent” (“con te, torrente”), which does not necessarily mean that the laughter is “torrential”.

<sup>6</sup> The word “soltanto” (“just”) in the source text refers to the poet being born “just” that sunny morning, which does not mean that the poet was “born alone”. Venuti’s misinterpretation drastically changes the meaning of the source text, suggesting that the poet may have been looking for isolation from the rest of the world.



## Grido

Non avere un Dio  
non avere una tomba  
non avere nulla di fermo  
ma solo cose vive che sfuggono—  
essere senza ieri  
essere senza domani  
ed acciecarsi nel nulla—  
— aiuto —  
per la miseria  
che non ha fine—

10 febbraio 1932

ALIGNED ST (ITALIAN) <b>GRIDO</b> (A. POZZI)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH) <b>CRYNG FOR HELP</b> (A. IACOVONI)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH) <b>SCREAM</b> (L. VENUTI)
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i.	Non avere un Dio	No God	Don't have a god
ii.	non avere una tomba	nor tomb	<b>no</b> <sup>7</sup> grave
iii.	non avere nulla di fermo	nor anything stable	nothing fixed
iv.	ma solo cose vive che sfuggono -	only life vanishing	only the living escape
v.	essere senza ieri	no yesterday	being without yesterday
vi.	essere senza domani	nor tomorrow	& tomorrow
vii.	ed acciecarsi nel nulla	blinded by nothingness	blinded in the nothing
viii.	— <b>aiuto</b> —	— help —	— <b>SOS</b> <sup>8</sup> —
ix.	per la miseria	such is misery	the sadness
x.	che non ha fine	without end	is endless

**Comment:** The image evoked by this poem is of utter, irrevocable despair [i-iii and v-vi]. The poet feels at complete loss [vii]. No god, no tomb (that may bring peace in death), the beloved around her passing away, no hope in the past [v] nor in the future [vi], and finally a desperate call for help [viii] in this misery without end [ix-x].

<sup>7</sup> The keywords here are the words “*non*” (“no”) [repeated three times, i-iii] and “*senza*” (“without”) [repeated two times, v-vi] which mark the poet’s anguish and hopelessness for a better future. This repetition is essential and should be preserved in the target text. Venuti, instead, chose to partially elide them in his English version. See footnote 4 for a similar example referring to a different poem.

<sup>8</sup> In the source text Antonia Pozzi uses the word “help” and definitely not “SOS”. In 1932, when she wrote this poem, the word “SOS” did not exist in the Italian vocabulary; it was introduced well after her premature death and likely used long after only in its technical sense, in reference to the emergency radio distress signal. In the English language it first appeared, as a technical term, following the 1908 International Radiotelegraphic Convention of Berlin. (Turnball, 1913). The assonance of “SOS” with “sadness” and “endless”, present in Venuti’s target text but missing in the source text, is not a good reason for choosing this word instead of the more straightforward “help”.

## La gioia

Domandavo a occhi chiusi  
— che cosa  
sarà domani la Pupa? —

Così ti facevo ridire  
in un sorriso le dolci parole  
— la sposa,  
la mamma —

Fiaba  
del tempo d'amore —  
profondo sorso — vita  
compiuta —  
gioia ferma nel cuore  
come un coltello nel pane.

26 settembre 1933

ALIGNED ST (ITALIAN)

**LA GIOIA** (ANTONIA POZZI)

ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH)

**THE JOY** (A. IACOVONI)

ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH)

**THE JOY** (L. VENUTI)

i.	Domandavo a occhi chiusi	I would close my eyes and ask	I shut my eyes, then asked
ii.	— che cosa	— what will	— what
iii.	sarà domani la <b>Pupa</b> ? —	baby girl be tomorrow? —	will <b>Babydoll</b> <sup>9</sup> be tomorrow?
iv.	Così ti facevo ridire	to make you repeat	I made you repeat
v.	in un sorriso le dolci parole	those sweet words, smiling	sweet words, smiling
vi.	— la sposa,	— “a wife”	— “wife”
vii.	la <b>mamma</b> —	“a mother” —	“ <b>mamma</b> ” <sup>10</sup> , —
viii.	Fiaba	Fairy tale	Fairy tale
ix.	del tempo d'amore —	of the times of love	love time —
x.	profondo sorso — vita	deep sip of life	deep sip — life
xi.	compiuta —	passed —	over —
xii.	gioia ferma nel cuore	joy firm in my heart	joy heart steady
xiii.	come un <b>coltello nel pane</b>	like a knife in a loaf of bread	like a <b>bread knife</b> <sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The word “*Pupa*”, typical of the dialect of the Lombardy region and originally used to indicate a child’s toy, comes from the Latin “*pupus*” = boy (Pianigiani, 1943). Being so specific to the regional culture in which the poet lived, it could have been a likely candidate for a foreignising approach. Venuti, instead, chose a domesticating one, probably to embrace a certain kind of reader, that would have possibly been at loss if “*Pupa*” had been left unchanged in the TT.

<sup>10</sup> For the average foreigner the word “*mamma*” will evoke the cliché of the loving and overly protective Italian mother. The impression is that Venuti is feeding his readers with what they are asking for, and not quite “moving the reader toward the author” (Schleiermacher, cited in Venuti 2008: 101). “*Mamma*” appears to be one of Venuti’s favorite candidates for (easy) foreignisation: it is left as a calque in yet another poem in this same collection (“*Scena unica*”).

<sup>11</sup> The source text says, literally, “a knife in bread”; and not “a bread knife”. Although the word “bread knife” does exist in contemporary Italian (“*coltello da pane*”), it is questionable whether it did back in 1930, when poverty was rampant and knives were employed for more than one specific use. In my mind, the expression “bread knife” evokes the image of a happy middle-class American family from the 70s, slicing bread for their breakfast toasts.

**Comment:** Memories of time past of love and peace [ix]. Joy that is stuck firmly in her heart as a knife in a loaf of bread [xii-xiii].

*Non so*

Io penso che il tuo modo di sorridere  
è più dolce del sole  
su questo vaso di fiori  
già un poco  
appassiti—

penso che forse è buono  
che cadano da me  
tutti gli alberi—

ch'io sia un piazzale bianco deserto  
alla tua voce— che forse  
disegna i viali  
per il nuovo  
giardino.

4 ottobre 1933

ALIGNED ST (ITALIAN)

**NON SO** (ANTONIA POZZI)

ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH)

**I DON'T KNOW**<sup>12</sup> (L. VENUTI)

i.	Io penso che il tuo modo di sorridere	I think your smile
ii.	è più dolce del sole	sweeter than the sun
iii.	su questo vaso di fiori	on this vase of flowers
iv.	già un poco	already a bit
v.	appassiti	faded
vi.	penso che forse è buono	maybe its good
vii.	che cadano da me	every tree drops before me
viii.	tutti gli alberi	
ix.	ch'io sia un <b>piazzale</b> bianco deserto	& <sup>13</sup> I'm an empty white <b>piazza</b> <sup>14</sup>
x.	alla tua voce – che forse	to your voice – maybe
xi.	disegna i viali	sketching paths
xii.	per il nuovo	in the new
xiii.	giardino	garden

<sup>12</sup> For this poem, only Venuti's own version was given.

<sup>13</sup> A slip. "&" does not translate the exhortative "Ch'io sia" ("that I may be") present in the source text. Antonia Pozzi expresses her desire to be an empty container for the voice of her beloved: "that I may be an empty white forecourt"

<sup>14</sup> The calque "piazza" in Venuti's version is different from the word "piazzale" used in the source text, which stands for a more common and plain forecourt. "Piazza" is a word that evokes memories of the beautiful Italian historical squares, such as "piazza del Popolo", "piazza San Marco", "piazza Navona", especially in the minds of the many tourists who have actually visited Italy. In this poem, instead, the poet is clearly referring to an "empty, white" forecourt. If Antonia Pozzi's intention had been to compare her inner-self to a beautiful "piazza", she would have used that word herself instead of "piazzale" (and possibly would not have committed suicide some years later).

**Comment:** A love poem? For sure it expresses the Poet's strong need for someone to fill her life, as empty as "an empty white forecourt" [ix].

## Riflessi

Parole—vetri  
che infedelmente  
rispecchiate il mio cielo—

di voi pensai  
dopo il tramonto  
in una oscura strada  
quando sui ciottoli una vetrata cadde  
ed i frantumi a lungo  
sparsero in terra lume—

26 settembre 1933

ALIGNED ST (ITALIAN) <b>RIFLESSI</b> (ANTONIA POZZI)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH) <b>REFLECTIONS</b> (A. IACOVONI)	ALIGNED TT (ENGLISH) <b>GLARE</b> <sup>15</sup> (L. VENUTI)
i. Parole – vetri	Words like glass	Words – glasswork
ii. che infedelmente	– unfaithful	how unfaithfully
iii. rispecchiate il mio cielo –	reflections of my sky –	you mirror my sky –
iv. di voi pensai	that remind me of	I thought of you
v. dopo il tramonto	a dark alley	after sunset
vi. in una oscura strada	after sunset	on a dark street
vii. quando sui ciottoli una vetrata cadde	when a windowpane fell on the cobblestones	when a window pane hit the cobblestones
viii. ed i frantumi a lungo	and scattered fragments	& splinters <b>slowly</b> <sup>16</sup>
ix. sparsero in terra lume	glimmering long after	scattered the bright ground <sup>17</sup>

**Comment:** The metaphor is of the fragments of glass being like the Poet’s words, which reflect her complex inner self, but not completely [ii]. The sky represents the Poet’s full self [iii] of which words [i] are but fragments [viii].

<sup>15</sup> The English word “glare” has a more concrete sense than the Italian “riflessi”, which points to both physical and abstract “reflections”. The poem is a metaphor of words *reflecting* the Poet’s inner self as glass *reflects* light: all of which is lost if the word “glare” is used instead of “reflections” (“riflessi”).

<sup>16</sup> A slip. Venuti probably misinterpreted lines vii-ix: in no place does the source text refer to events happening “slowly”. On the contrary, the poem is clearly evoking immediacy of action: a windowpane suddenly breaking into pieces.

<sup>17</sup> Venuti probably misunderstood the image evoked by the Poet: a windowpane breaks and sends tiny shards of glass on the ground that reflect light in a dark alley. “Scattered the bright ground” renders the meaning unnecessarily cryptic, whereas it is explicit in the source text.

### 3. Results

Table A. (below) summarizes the examples of domestication and foreignisation (calques) found in each poem. Please note that this study does not attempt to make any statistical claims over these findings, given the very small sample of poems actually reviewed (5/84 poems). Nonetheless, it could point to a trend that would have to be confirmed by reviewing a larger number of poems, an effort that however goes beyond the scope of this brief essay.

TABLE A. EXAMPLES OF DOMESTICATION AND FOREIGNISATION (CALQUES) IN THE FIVE POEMS REVIEWED.

<u>NAME OF POEM</u>	<u>STRATEGY</u>	<u>LINE</u>	<u>FOOTNOTE</u>	<u>ALIGNED ST</u>	<u>ALIGNED TT</u>
ACQUA ALPINA	FOREIGNISATION	TITLE	3	“ALPINA”	“ALPINE”
GRIDO	DOMESTICATION	VIII	8	“HELP”	“SOS”
LA GIOIA	DOMESTICATION	III	9	“PUPA”	“BAYBYDOLL”
“ “	FOREIGNISATION	VII	10	“MAMMA”	“MAMMA”
“ “	DOMESTICATION	XIII	11	“COLTELLO NEL PANE”	“BREAD KNIFE”
NON SO	FOREIGNIZATION	IX	14	“PIAZZALE”	“PIAZZA”
RIFLESSI	DOMESTICATION	TITLE	15	“RIFLESSI”	“GLARE”

As can be clearly seen, in the poems considered in this study the examples of *domestication* appear to prevail over those of *foreignisation*.

It is interesting to note that Venuti’s choice of taking either a domesticating or a foreignising approach appeared at times rather questionable.

Calques, for example, were employed often more with the intent of “pleasing” readers with easy-to-recognize Italian words such as “mamma” and “piazza” (see footnote 10 and 14) than with the aim of actually exposing foreigners to the culture of the source text. The word “mamma”, in particular, was left untranslated in more than one poem (see footnote 10) and as such appears to be one of Venuti’s favorite candidates for this rather *cheap* foreignisation.

Domestication, on the other hand, was sometimes applied for no apparent reason in sections where a more literal translation perhaps would have been more appropriate (see footnotes 8, 9, 11, 15).

#### **4. Conclusions**

In the translations considered, the instances of domestication appear to prevail over those of foreignisation. The inconsistency hypothesized at the beginning of this essay, between Lawrence Venuti's theory of the *translator's visibility* and his practice, appears to be grounded: Dr. Venuti *the theoretician*, proponent of foreignisation, succumbs to his twin Mr. Venuti, *the translator*, paladin of domestication.

It could also be, however, that he might not. This brief study could indicate that, ultimately, the debate between *either* foreignisation *or* domestication, popularized by Venuti decades after it first appeared<sup>18</sup>, could be just one of many examples of an inconclusive struggle between concepts that don't exclude each other.

If this were the case, domestication and foreignisation would not be competing strategies (*either* black *or* white), but just two different modes of translation, both of which can be employed concurrently, as they actually appear to have been in the poems reviewed<sup>19</sup>.

Words: 4227

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<sup>18</sup> In modern times this debate was tackled, among others, by Berman and Schleiermacher.

<sup>19</sup> Further study would be required to corroborate this point to include reviews of translations from other literary genres and possibly different types of foreignising approaches.

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She was born on 13 February 1912 into an affluent Milanese family. Her father, Roberto Pozzi, was a lawyer who in 1936 was appointed by the Fascist Party to serve as *podestà* or mayor of a Lombard village; her mother, Lina Cavagna Sangiuliani, was related to the Romantic poet Tommaso Grossi, an associate of the great nineteenth-century novelist Alessandro Manzoni.

Antonina Pozzi received the fine education that befitted her class. She attended the best schools, learned languages, studied music and art, practiced such sports as tennis, horseback riding, skiing, and mountain climbing. She visited various towns throughout Italy, especially winter and summer resorts, and traveled to England, France, Germany, Austria, Greece, and North Africa.

During the 1930s she was a member of an elite cultural circle, the friend of leading Italian writers and thinkers. At the University of Milan, she studied with the influential philosopher Antonio Banfi. Her classmates, all students of Banfi, included figures who later distinguished themselves in literary criticism (Luciano Anceschi), poetry (Vittorio Sereni), and philosophy (Enzo Paci). The thinking was modernist, in touch with recent German trends such as phenomenology and existentialism, socially engaged, and inevitably responding, in part, to the repressive, imperialistic agendas of Italian Fascism.

Under Banfi's tutelage, Pozzi wrote a thesis on Flaubert's literary development. She planned to write an ambitious historical novel about northern Lombardy, about the land and its people, starting in the 1870s and spanning three generations. She took artfully composed photographs of the Lombard countryside, the mountains and lakes, churches and fairs, the workers and the children in the villages.

In 1937 she began teaching at a Milanese technical institute and performed volunteer social work, visiting the poor and assisting in juvenile courts. A year later she underwent an appendectomy, and although she recovered, her fragile health was weakened. On 2 December 1938 her body was found on the outskirts of the city, near the abbey of Chiaravalle, in the snow. She had drugged herself and contracted pneumonia. She died the next day. The note she left behind refers to "something hidden

in my nature, an illness of the nerves that deprives me of every resistance and prevents me from seeing things in a balanced way.” The official report, following the family’s instructions but also reflecting a request in her note, describes the cause of death as a “sudden attack.”

Among Pozzi’s papers was found a set of notebooks that contained over three hundred poems. Her parents called this body of work “an intimate diary” that she kept “modestly hidden.” Written between 1929 and 1938, the poems were known only to Pozzi’s closest friends, particularly two women (Lucia Bozzi and Elvira Gandini) whom she had met in secondary school.



Antonia Pozzi, 1929

*"A thoughtful, elegant and very much needed volume. Pozzi is one of Italy's most accomplished women poets. Venuti's excellent introduction and sensitive translations will finally bring her art to a wider readership."*

—Rebecca West,  
Professor of Italian and  
Cinema/Media Studies,  
University of Chicago

**A**t the start of a promising career, Antonia Pozzi (1912–1938) committed suicide, leaving behind several hundred poems known only to her closest friends. The posthumous publication of this work led Eugenio Montale to praise Pozzi's "desire to reduce the weight of words to the minimum." Her modernist verse is lyrical and experimental, pastoral and erotic, powerfully evoking the northern Italian landscape and her personal tragedies amid the repressive climate of Fascism. *Breath* contains a representative selection of Pozzi's poems in an Italian/ English format along with a number of her letters. In an introductory essay, editor-translator **Lawrence Venuti** documents her tormented life, considers her sophisticated thinking about her writing, and sketches the rich literary traditions that she inherited, creating a detailed context in which her poems can be more fully appreciated. The translations affiliate Pozzi's poetry with the work of comparable English-language writers such as H.D., Mina Loy, and Lorine Niedecker, establishing in translation what Pozzi lacked in Italian: a tradition of modernist women's poetics.

**LAWRENCE VENUTI** is Professor of English at Temple University. His latest books include *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998) and the translation of Juan Rodolfo Wilcock's *The Temple of Iconoclasts* (2000).

Cover: The Dolomites, 1936. Photograph by Antonia Pozzi.

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