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**Past and present
in translation collaborative practices and
cooperation**

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**“Of course there is something here and there
I’m afraid I don’t quite understand”.¹
Cesare Pavese’s correspondence
with Anthony Chiuminatto:
a collaborative translation strategy?**

Kim Grego
University of Milan

Abstract

The Italian writer Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) is also known as an ‘Americanist’, or populariser of American culture, mainly thanks to his work as a translator in Italy during the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1929 and 1933, he entertained frequent and detailed consultations by letter with his Italian-American correspondent Antonio Chiuminatto. Pavese’s requests were mainly lexical, focusing especially on slang and idiomatic expressions. The Pavese-Chiuminatto correspondence is thus explored, examining their collaboration, how it worked and developed, and extracting Pavese’s metalinguistic reflections on slang and language in general. Finally, the epistolary is framed within the notion of ‘collaborative translation’, in order to understand Chiuminatto’s contribution to Pavese’s famous translation activity and the possible implications for his well-known role as an Americanist.

Keywords: Cesare Pavese, Anthony Chiuminatto, translation, collaborative translation, Americanism.

1. Introduction and materials

1.1. Cesare Pavese the translator and Americanist

While the intense activity of the Italian writer Cesare Pavese (Santo Stefano Belbo, 1908 – Turin, 1950) as a novelist, poet and essayist has been the

¹ Cesare Pavese, Letter to Antonio Chiuminatto dated 26 November 1930, in *Mondo* (1966: 93).

subject of studies and considerations by literary critics for decades, his work as a translator is undoubtedly less studied from an academic perspective. Not that it has not been addressed, even in insightful and enthusiastic ways (cf., e.g., Gorlier 1964; Stella 1977; Bernascone 2010; Pietralunga 2012; and see the scant bibliography on Pavese's translations in Mesiano 2007: 398-402 and Dore 2016: 141-142). Rather, it is emphasised here how his translations are considered especially in regard to his activity as an 'Americanist', or populariser of American literature, which he carried out in Italy in the first half of the 20th century. The most famous example of that spell of Italian Americanism is possibly the often-cited anthology *Americana* (1940/1942), edited by Elio Vittorini, published by Bompiani, Milan, introduced by Emilio Cecchi, and translated, among others, by Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia and, naturally, Cesare Pavese. The major focus, in other words, has always mostly been on Pavese's import and promotion of American novelists, and on the role his translations played in making American culture known to Italy's general public. Especially in the decades after the Second World War and until the 1970s, particular emphasis was placed on the anti-fascist value of such dissemination work, seen from the understandably ideological perspective that characterised the Italian intellectual scene of the time.

Considerably less studied, as previously said, are Pavese's translations *in se* and *per se*, both from a linguistic and translational point of view. Over the decades, scholars – not many of them, actually – have partly addressed issues related to the evaluation of his translations, the degree of lexical-terminological accuracy, the employment of syntactic adaptation strategies and the stylistic aspect (cf., e.g., Bozzola 1991; Billiani 1999; Masoero 2014). Partly, nonetheless, these questions still remain unanswered. In recent decades, the interpretation of Pavese's work has been slightly less influenced by the aura of the politically engaged intellectual that used to surround him. This means that his translations, too, may now be considered not only as finished literary *products* and cultural *practices*, but also in their capacity of linguistic and cognitive *processes* (Grego 2010). Therefore, we could legitimately add another question to the previous list, which is: *how* did Pavese translate, especially as regards lexicon? While it is currently still impossible to be 'in the head' of a translator *ex post*, to partly reconstruct Pavese's method is not, especially given the amount of reflections on the subject that he meticulously and famously left in his letters, diaries, essays and notes. The recent edition of his correspondence with his American acquaintance Anthony Chiuminatto (Pietralunga 2007) can therefore

contribute to shedding light on the latter aspect which, as will be seen, may be identified as a translation collaboration strategy.

1.2. Anthony Chiuminatto

Anthony Chiuminatto was born in Rivarolo Canavese (Turin, Italy) on 31 May 1904, and died in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1973. Emigrated to the United States with his mother when only a few months old, he came to Italy from Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1925 and enrolled at the Regio Conservatorio di Musica ‘Giuseppe Verdi’ in Turin. In October 1929, after his graduation, he returned to America. According to him (Pietralunga 2007: 5-6), it was in 1926-27 that he came into contact with two young university students from Turin, Massimo Mila and Cesare Pavese, who were interested in practicing American English and with whom he met several times, especially in city cafés, precisely for this purpose. Back in Green Bay, Chiuminatto would keep in touch by mail with both Mila and Pavese. His correspondence with Mila soon ceased, while that with Pavese continued until 1933. Meanwhile, Chiuminatto embarked on a brilliant professional career in the musical field, both as a performer (he was a distinguished violinist) and a conductor, and later as a teacher and musicologist. Well after the end of his correspondence with his Italian pen-pal, Chiuminatto crowned a successful career by becoming the first director of the Department of Music at St. Thomas College in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1946, a position he would hold until his death (Pietralunga: 22). His personal and epistolary relationship with Pavese is therefore limited to the 1926/27-1933 period. His linguistic competence was that of a professional musician and music scholar, a native speaker of American English and a proficient bilingual speaker of Italian, who took a serious interest (spurred by Pavese) in his other language, but was certainly no literature expert or translator either by training or by profession.

1.3. The Pavese-Chiuminatto epistolary

Pavese’s letters to Chiuminatto have been known to the public since their first publication, in 1966, edited by Lorenzo Mondo, with translations from English by Italo Calvino. A second edition, published in 1973 under the title *Vita attraverso le lettere*, also edited by Lorenzo Mondo, includes a small selection of such letters. Neither volume, however, featured Chiuminatto’s responses to Pavese. These (together with one letter by Pavese dated 22 February 1930 that had escaped Mondo in 1966) were instead patiently

retrieved by Mark Pietralunga at the Guido Gozzano - Cesare Pavese Study Centre in Turin, then transcribed and published in 2007 in the volume *Cesare Pavese & Anthony Chiuminatto: Their Correspondence*. This collects them for the first time in chronological order, thus alternating questions and replies and adding, as an appendix, the meticulous work of translation and explanation of Anglo-American terms and expressions unknown to Pavese that Chiuminatto carried out for him in those years. It totals 70 letters – of which 32 by Pavese and 38 by Chiuminatto – that were exchanged between 29 November 1929 and 8 March 1933. Table 1 details all the letters in the correspondence.²

² Quotations from the letters shall refer to this table, indicating author (CP or AC), date (dd.mm.yyyy) and page as in Pietralunga (2007).

CP	AC	CP	AC	CP	AC
29 Nov. 1929 →	← 24 Dec. 1929 ← 26 Dec. 1929	21 Jun. 1930 →	← 30 Jun. 1930 ← 5 Jul. 1930	May 1931 →	← 28 May 1931
12 Jan. 1930 →		20 Jul. 1930 →		14 Jun. 1931 →	← 29 Jun. 1931
22 Jan. 1930 →		31 Jul. 1930 →		Jul. 1931 →	
	← 1 Feb. 1930 ← 11 Feb. 1930	19 Aug. 1930 →	← 1 Aug. 1930	28 Aug. 1931 →	← 8 Sep. 1931 ← 22 Sep. 1931
22 Feb. 1930 →		22 Sep. 1930 →	← 2 Sep. 1930	15 Oct. 1931 →	← 29 Oct. 1931
1 Mar. 1930 →	← 24 Feb. 1930 ← 15 Mar. 1930 ← 18 Mar. 1930 ← 19 Mar. 1930	28 Oct. 1930 →	← 22 Sep. 1930 ← 7 Oct. 1930	24 Dec. 1931 →	← 6 Jan. 1932
5 Apr. 1930 →		26 Nov. 1930 →	← 11 Nov. 1930	Jan. 1932 →	← 21 Feb. 1932
17 Apr. 1930 →			← 6 Dec. 1930 ← 18 Dec. 1930	2 Apr. 1932 →	← 3 Jun. 1932
22 Apr. 1930 →	← 28 Apr. 1930 ← 7 May 1930 ← 16 May 1930	9 Jan. 1931 →	← 23 Jan. 1931	24 Jul. 1932 →	← 14 Nov. 1932
17 May 1930 →	← 27-May-30 ← 5 Jun. 1930 ← 7 Jun. 1930	11 Feb. 1931 →	← 25 Feb. 1931 ← 12 Mar. 1931	1 Dec. 1932 →	← 16 Dec. 1932
		18 Mar. 1931 →		24 Jan. 1933 →	← 8 Mar. 1933
10 Jun. 1930 →		26 Mar. 1931 →	← 24 Apr. 1931		
				<i>Tot.: 32</i>	<i>Tot.: 38</i>

Table 1: The Pavese (CP) – Chiuminatto (AC) correspondence, 1929-1933

Adding to the epistolary, the appendix included by Pietralunga (2007) collects Chiuminatto’s translations of specific terms and expressions, which occupy 128 pages, i.e. almost the same space as the entire collection of letters (146 pages), and refer to the novels:

-
- *Dark Laughter* (1925) by Sherwood Anderson (*ibid.*: 173-200);
 - *Babbitt* (1922) by Sinclair Lewis (*ibid.*: 201-262);
 - *Arrowsmith* (1925) by Sinclair Lewis (*ibid.*: 263-300);
 - *As I Lay Dying* (1930) by William Faulkner (*ibid.*: 301-302).

Note that, of all these works, Pavese only published the first in his own translation, i.e. *Riso nero*, in 1932, for Frassinelli, Turin. He translated and published other novels by Lewis and Faulkner, but not these ones. Therefore, although examples of Chiuminatto's annotations concerning all four of the novels listed above will be reported here, an all-round reflection can only be made with respect to *Dark Laughter*.

2. Objectives and methods

In light of the above, the purposes of this study can be formulated as the following research questions: what was the role of Anthony Chiuminatto in Cesare Pavese's American translations? How did their collaboration work and develop? Can the result of such work be understood as a form of collaborative translation? And what are the implications with respect to Pavese's role as a translator and Americanist?

To understand and organise the notes that Chiuminatto wrote for Pavese, i.e. his interpretations of the terms and expressions unknown to the Italian writer of which he asked the meaning, it is firstly necessary to clarify what the two correspondents meant by (American) English 'slang' and, secondly, what is meant by 'slang' currently. This can help classify the various words and phrases listed by Pavese (only a selection of which will be reported in this introductory pilot study, see note 6), since 'slang' may not be the correct or the only label to use. To this purpose, reference is made to lexicological and lexicographical works, some of which including sociolinguistic and pragmatic reflections to better define the object of the analysis: Barnhart (1978), Widawski (2015), Dalzell (2018), Pinnavaia (2018) and Yong (2022).

Secondly, the historical approach within Translation Studies may be at least partly considered, referring in particular to Pym (1998), who supports the view of attempting to "explain why translations were produced in a particular social time and place" (*ibid.*: ix), i.e. what he calls 'social causation'. To do so, the focus should be placed, in his opinion, on the human translator and "their social entourage (clients, patrons, readers)"

(*ibid.*: ix), and on the “social contexts where translators live and work” or ‘intercultures’ (*ibid.*: x). In addition, this ought to be done bearing in mind that any historical investigation of translation, while uncovering the “movement of people and texts” (*ibid.*: 18), should be relevant in and for the present, or ‘here and now’ (*ibid.*: x). Although Pym’s (1998) approach is generally believed by the author to be much historical and little linguistic – “[i]t is certainly not by removing translation from History that the primary function of the dynamics of transfer and circulation will be recognised” (Agorni 2021: 11) – , the method he suggests seems to fit the wider scope of this study, in that the story of Pavese and Chiuminatto centres around two specific persons, their specific places and time, their social entourage, the texts and culture they ‘moved’ from America to Italy and the intercultures they thus created.

Thirdly, within the functionalist Translation Studies tradition (Nord 1997), according to which in the intercultural translation process the responsibility mostly lies with the translator and his or her linguistic and cultural choices, it was useful to rely on research conducted on collaborative translation. This, rather than a methodological approach, may be better understood (with the exception of Pym 2011: 77 that considers it a synonym of crowdsourcing) as a vision of the translation process. In this perspective, especially relevant for this study are Agorni (2005, 2021, 2022), in particular for the notions of (in)visibility and trust, and O’Brien (2011) and Cordingly and Frigau Manning (2017) about the (political) role of translators-collaborators. Collaborative translation can furthermore be conceived as both the practice of collaborating in the various editorial phases of translation, revision, editing, publication, etc., and the cognitive process, shared by several people, of performing the textual transposition. The present study does not focus on the former, although the relationship between Pavese the translator and his publishers is very interesting, above all that with Giulio Einaudi, with whom he had a notoriously conflicting, almost love-hate relationship– cf. the letter he famously wrote to Einaudi on 14 April 1942, see Mondo 1966: 173. Conversely, the intellectual and collaborative relationship between Pavese and Chiuminatto evidently concerns the latter.

3. Slang, idiom and ‘I don’t know what’: Chiuminatto the translator?

3.1. Slang

Answering the first research question, i.e. what role Anthony Chiuminatto played in Cesare Pavese's American translations, is formally quite simple: the Italian writer himself asks his interlocutor for help with "slang, idioms, I don't know what" (CP, 20.11.1929, p. 26), to "understand better your contemporary writers [...] for an half incomprehensible" (*ibid.*)³. Pavese's naive view as to what slang and what idioms are is supposedly due in part to his young age (he was 21 years old in 1929), in part to his inexperience with English, a language that was geographically and culturally distant at the time, and to the fact that, as a translator, his focus was mainly on the Italian rendering of the text. However, what is certain is that the non-expert's confusion about the concept remains even to this day, when English is the global lingua franca of diplomacy, science and technology and, as such, is widely known as a second language by a very large share of the world's population. It is therefore worth clarifying the term linguistically, perhaps to discover that Pavese's vague definition was ultimately not so unjustified.

Under the umbrella term of 'slang', heterogeneous linguistic realities such as idioms, phrasal verbs, technical jargon and even African-American vernacular (cf. Green 2004), etc. are often brought together, with the quality of belonging to a low or colloquial register being their only common denominator: "[l]anguage of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting of new words or of current words employed in some special sense" (*OED*, s.v. SLANG, n. 3). It is thus clear how, even among linguists, the concept is not always neatly or univocally defined, how it has only been approached in recent times and, as such, is still significantly understudied.

Scholarly interest in non-standard forms of American English historically emerged, according to Yong (2022: 85), towards the end of the 19th century, with the collection of essays *Good English or popular errors in language* (1867) by Edward S. Gould. A number of purely prescriptive manuals of style about the (correct) use of the language then followed, until the publication of the first real North American slang dictionaries, in the second half of the 20th century: *A dictionary of American slang* (1926, 64 pp.) by Clement Wood and Gloria Goddard and the larger and even more

³ All the examples from Pietralunga (2007) report the spellings as in his edition, which include the many 'imperfections' of Pavese's English and which were diligently aintained by editor Mark Pietralunga (2007: ix). Wherever the annotation '[sic]' is found, it only refers to actual misspellings.

significant *Dictionary of American slang* (1960, 766 pp.), compiled by Harold Wentworth and Stuart B. Flexner.

Also according to Barnhart (1978: 94), who reviewed American lexicography from 1945 to 1973, Wentworth and Flexner (1960) remained the only work of its kind at least until 1973, excluding a 1952 *American thesaurus of slang*. Regarding this scarcity, Barnhart (1978: 96) further reflects: “[t]he neglect of the study of slang results in a vacuum in our knowledge of an important and innovative part of language that is an important and innovative part of the influx of new technical terms and much less well understood”. Another resource he cites is the *Dictionary of American underworld lingo* (Goldin, O’Leary and Lipsius 1950), from which he derives that there is “only 50 percent general agreement as to what constitutes a slang word or meaning” (Barnhart 1978: 95). He therefore wonders: “[w]hen is a colloquial term slang? Clearly the word slang’ itself needs to be defined more exactly than it has been so far (ibid.).

Coming to the present, it is a fact that “slang dictionaries started to mushroom upon the dawn of the 21st century” (Yong 2022: 88). An interesting example is the *Routledge dictionary of modern American slang and unconventional English*, edited by Tom Dalzell (2008), which edits and builds upon Eric Partridge’s historical *Dictionary of slang and unconventional English* (1937). The uncertainty about what makes up slang, however, is not definitively resolved even to this day, if Dalzell (2008: vii) too states

[r]ather than focus too intently on a precise definition of slang or on whether a given entry is slang, jargon or colloquial English, I borrow the wide net cast by Partridge when he chose to record ‘slang and unconventional English’ instead of just slang, which is, after all, without any settled test of purity.

It can therefore be concluded, in Widaski’s words (2015: 7), that no differently than in the past

very few professional linguists study slang as their main academic field. Instead, slang is mostly described by amateurs who often lack the necessary knowledge to adequately analyze it. As a result, slang continues to be misunderstood and is perceived as a mere sensational or vulgar deviation from standard language.

In the appendices of the Pavese-Chiuminatto correspondence, where Pietralunga (2007: 173-302) collected the meticulous translations and

explanations by the American musician, the examples of slang – diastratically low varieties of a certain standard – truly abound. To name just a few due to space reasons, we can report the words ‘pep’, ‘slap’ and ‘ragamuffin’, which the Green Bay musician explains, translates and puts into context in fluent and even occasionally articulate Italian:

[a] lot of pep in his book. ‘lot’ è comunissimo e si traduce perfettamente con il francese ‘beaucoup de’ – A lot of. ‘Pep’ è un americanismo per dire ‘della vita’ (p. 179);

to slap it home. (oppure) To slap it to someone – ed altre di queste forme con poche variazioni di preposizioni, vogliono dire ‘Lasciarlo a qualcuno Darlo a qualcuno’ nel senso di ‘daglielo!’ When it comes to English, slap it home to Pavese. Quando si tratta d’inglese, lascialo a Pavese! (daglielo a Pavese.) To slap, slapping, slapped, slapped – ‘schiaffeggiare’ (classico). Nello slang vuol dire ‘gettare ironicamente’ come si fa con certe frasi di disprezzo (p. 196);

ragamuffin – Scugnizzo – Straccione da strada (p. 250).

Many other instances appear in said appendix, which ought to be explored in greater detail and possibly will be in future studies (see note 6).

3.2. Idioms

Closely related to slang, so much so that it is sometimes equated with it, is the concept of ‘idiom’ or idiomatic expression:

[i]diom is erroneously equated with slang, too. [...] However, in order for idioms to be considered slang, they would have to be socially and stylistically lower than standard English. The difference, then, lies in their social and stylistic acceptability rather than in phrase structure itself. Moreover, although numerous slang expressions happen to be idioms, slang is not restricted to the form of a phrase; consequently, the following examples are all slang but not idiom: *cool* (‘excellent or admirable’), *babelicious* (‘sexually attractive’), *peanuts* (‘small amount of money’) or *wuss* (‘weak person’). (Widawski 2015: 10-11)

Again, even in the case of idioms there is no unambiguous categorization of the linguistic phenomenon. According to Hudson (1998), for instance, idioms can be classified following a syntactic criterion, while Wray (2002)

refers a semantic one. Pinnavaia (2018: 5) defines them as a minimum of two words, the combination of which gives rise to a meaning that is defined idiomatic or figurative in certain reference dictionaries; however, she excludes phrasal verbs and lexicalised nominal compounds. What she adds regarding the latter – that “[t]he inclusion and exclusion of phraseological types from the sub-category of idiom is in fact not univocal but at the discretion of each linguist” (*ibid.*) – can therefore be extended in general to the very concept of idiomatic expression: idioms remain extremely discretionary realities, whose understanding varies according to the linguistic perspective adopted by those who study them. As has been shown, Pavese’s profane expression “slang, idioms, I don’t know what” (CP, 20.11.1929, p. 26) was not so far removed, back in 1929, from the current specialised conception of the same phenomena. For the purposes of this work, therefore, an idiom will be defined, following Pinnavaia (2018: 3), as an expression of at least two words with well-defined syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties; nevertheless, phrasal verbs and lexicalised compound nouns shall also be included, if only because Pavese frequently and expressly listed them among the terms he asked Chiuminatto to explain to him.

Examples of idiomatic expressions found in Chiuminatto’s translations in Pietralunga (2007) are:

Shake a leg – Faccia in fretta! (p. 256)

and

the cat’s pajamas – modo di dire era tutto quello che si poteva desiderare. Abbiamo un sacco di questi mod[i], che poi vogliono dire la stessa cosa – per esempio To be the cat’s meow! cat’s pajamas. To be the snake’s hips! To be the berries! ECC. To put on the dog – darsi delle arie! (p. 299).

Having chosen to include phrasal verbs in the category, the following may also be reported:

[t]o let on. – Questa è una frase che si potrebbe spiegare con un’altra in inglese, cioè, ‘to make believe’ (far credere). Vuol anche dire ‘fingere’ (p. 173);

to blurt. – blurting, blurted, blurted – seguito generalmente dalla preposizione ‘out’ e che vuol dire ‘parlare senza pensarci su’ come fa l’individuo che deve rispondere subito e che non sa cosa dire e quindi dice basta che sia, interrottamente! (p. 224);

to which at least one phrasal prepositional verb may be added:

[t]o get away with something. – Farla franca (p. 242).

3.3. ‘I don’t know what’

Even the expanded definition of idiom adopted here, however, does not include various other linguistic phenomena that Pavese asked Chiuminatto to account for. Thus, it was decided to list some of them under the label ‘I don’t know what’ of Pavesian coinage. Chiuminatto’s explanations reported in Pietralunga (2007) include examples of literal meanings, non-standard spellings and contractions, such as

[t]o maul someone. – Non è slang ma puro inglese! Vuol dire ‘to beat some one, to handle roughly, to hammer someone.’ Si usa quando si vuol intendere il battersi forte (p. 174),

which was simply a word unknown to Pavese or one that he could not find in a dictionary, and

[w]hat t’ell. – Abbreviazione di ‘What the Hell!’ frase (p. 177).

Other commentaries, nonetheless, deal with cultural issues. It is the case of

White Sox. – È una squadra professionale di giocatori di baseball – giuoco molto amato in America (p. 177),

baseball being something that Pavese, like most other sports, did not seem fond of. Another example is

roll of bread – Un pane qualunque in forma di rotolo, così formato perchè nei ristoranti da noi sono più comodi a manipolare che non una mica (p. 179),

similar to the Italian *panino*, but of course not as localised as the Piedmontese *biova* and *mica*. Rather more complex is the subject of the African-American vernacular and the related cultural references. Here Chiuminatto willingly explains what is known to him, for example,

Old Master – (Vecchio Padrone) che sarebbe ‘Dio’ nel modo negro⁴ (p. 302).

Equally confident is he when he explains the mysteries of black magic, going so far as to specify the word’s stress. From the following explanation, however, a clear cultural also bias emerges that must obviously be understood in the context of the historical period:

[a] Voodooistic power. – Da ‘Voodoo’ ch’è il nome del mago negro. ‘Voodooism’ è la forma di superstizione e di magia degenerata che si trova fra i negri degli Stati Uniti e che è l’eco della barbaria Africana. Quindi qui vuol dire ‘avere la potenza, il potere del mago negro.’ Si pronuncia – vudu – con l’accento sulla prima! (p. 220)

To be fair to him, as a white Italian-American from Wisconsin, Chiuminatto is the first to admit the limits of his knowledge of the language and culture of his black compatriots, not only regarding specific expressions such as

‘[o] ma banjo dog’ è una forma negra per ‘Oh my banjo dog’ ma tutto quello che so di questa frase è qui! Se mai vengo a sapere qualchecosa di piu’ Le scrivero’ (p. 194);

To cut loose with the colors. – To open up with the colors. – Che vuol dire ‘mettere in vista d’improvviso dei colori.’ Riferisce forse ai negri che sono usi a mescolare i colori negli abiti e certe volte fan persin male agli occhi! [...] Nello slang si usa per spiegare un atto [sic] d’improvviso che abbia in se qualche cosa di furioso, qualche cosa che urta. ‘Tagliarsi libero’ è la forma letterale, ‘scattare,’ direi (p. 178),

but also when engaging, albeit as a non-linguist, in a not-so-trivial reflection of a more general nature:

⁴ The spelling, here and elsewhere, is that of the original and must, of course, be understood against the backdrop of the times.

[n]egro slang is about the hardest to understand, for we hear so little of it and on the other hand we get so much of it in writing! This kind of slang would be as well known to me as the pure American slang were I a resident of the negro States, such as Missouri or Alabama (AC, 26.12.1929, p. 31).

In this reflection, while calling ‘slang’ – in line with the approximate use that Pavese makes of the term – what is actually a sub-variety of American English, he nonetheless nails the diatopic dimension of its diffusion, which is what in fact prevents him from fully understanding the African American vernacular. Although this does not emerge from Chiuminatto’s words, at least not here, the reference to ‘pure’ American slang should be seen not as a racial evaluation but as the perception that, in addition to its geographical distribution, what also sets white slang apart is the social (diastratic) dimension.

4. The Pavese-Chiuminatto team: a translation collaboration

To answer the second research question – whether the exchange between Cesare Pavese and Anthony Chiuminatto did in fact constitute a form of collaborative translation – it is necessary to investigate the nature and development of their relationship. Fortunately, their epistolary, now available in its entirety, seems to clarify it accurately and extensively. The first thing to underline is that their acquaintance did not start out by mail: they met in person, face to face, and saw each other regularly in Turin. This could suggest that they were friends, to begin with. However, Pavese himself tells a different tale, in his very first letter to America:

[d]o you remember our slang lessons? You see: I took advantages of you the most brazen-facedly, but as for you now the saddest thing is certainly whether I intend to go on (CP, 20.11.1929, p. 25).

The tone is friendly, as is most of their correspondence, but it is immediately made clear how their meetings, initially facilitated by the Turin-born intellectual and common acquaintance Massimo Mila, had a utilitarian function right from the start, aimed as they were at the teaching and learning of English. In this way, Chiuminatto could spend time with some locals, while studying music in Turin, and Pavese was able to approach the American culture he had been passionate about since high school – a

passion that led him, not much later on (1930), to write his university thesis on Walt Whitman. Only one month after Chiuminatto had returned to the United States, Pavese was already reaching out to him by letter, to consult him “brazen-facedly” about what he did not understand of Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark laughter*, whose Italian translation, *Riso nero*, he would publish in 1932. The reference to his brazenness and the fact that he “took advantages”, with which the epistolary opens, establishes the ‘business-like’ nature of his request, typical of Pavese’s ‘business of translating’⁵.

Given the historical period, their letters were exchanged by mail, naturally. While this is obvious, it may inspire a few less evident reflections: intercontinental mail took a long time to reach its destination, and presupposed significant time and economic commitment on both parts. It is possibly correct to hypothesise that, should Chiuminatto have stayed on in Turin, Pavese would probably have consulted him in person, orally, over a hot drink in a café under the porticos. This would have been oral mediation, clearly, and, in that way, we would have had no trace of their collaboration: the American musician’s role would have remained invisible – yet another case of disappearance and loss of collaborative work, against Agorni’s (2022: 27) hope, shared by many a scholar including the author, that “the visibility of all actors involved in the translation process may become a methodological key to investigating present and future cultural dynamics in Translation Studies”. As things are, Pavese and Chiuminatto corresponded and also exchanged material, and sending books to-and-fro across the Atlantic often required a degree of inventiveness, as well as implying some political risk, since Italy’s fascist censorship was in force and the US customs also kept a close watch. This is where motivations come into play. No matter how hard one tries, and from whatever angle one looks at it, Pavese’s intention seems to be nothing but opportunistic, aimed at obtaining a) linguistic clarifications, especially lexical ones, for his translations and b) books by American authors, both on loan from libraries and to purchase from bookshops. Of course Pavese, coming as he did from an impoverished middle-class family that nonetheless retained its dignified Piedmontese manners, was quick to pay Chiuminatto back whatever he owed. Indeed, the exchange of money across the Atlantic, the price lists of the various books, the sums of the purchase bills, and the shipping rates and times are perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the publication

⁵ A *mestiere* is a business or a trade, as in Pavese’s posthumously published diary, *Il mestiere di vivere*, or *The business of living* (1952).

edited by Pietralunga. To the timely financial reimbursement, Pavese added the occasional gift: one may check out the entertaining “liquor-center chocolates” (CP, 17.05.1930, p. 72) story, unfolding over numerous letters. The gourmet sweets, shipped around mid-May 1930, only arrived at the end of June, in the number of seven, having probably been decimated by the American customs officers.

If Pavese’s motivation is clear, Chiuminatto’s too, after carefully reading his missives, appears to be equally evident. It seems, however, different and based on something closer to friendship. The musician does not seem to have any particular need for or gain any advantage from corresponding with Pavese, if one excludes the occasional box of chocolates, of which he is fond. He asks nothing of the young translator from Turin. On the contrary, he devotes enormous amounts of time to his requests, finding and loaning books from local libraries, which he then sends to Italy for him to read and returns when they come back to the United States, always by mail. He carries out *blitz* missions in bookshops to buy him more novels, often paying in advance, then runs to the post office to ship them off to him. He racks his brains to provide him with accurate translations and reasoned explanations, which he notes down in long, detailed letters. So it would seem that he does it entirely for pleasure and, thus, for friendship:

[i]t was a pleasure for me to be able to explain the list of slang and non slang phrases that you sent me (AC, 24.12.1929, p. 28).

However, far from being the stereotypical over-eager American enthusiast, Chiuminatto appears to feel some sincere pleasure in providing information about the American language and culture, a task that he carries out with a certain degree of national pride. In this way, he also possibly keeps a connection with Italy as one of those emigrants who got ‘lucky’, if one can say so, and now promotes his adoptive land especially in his country of origin. His motivation may thus have been twofold: to maintain relations with Italy, on the one hand, and to perhaps exercise an unconscious sort of soft power on the other. Last but not least, we should consider the sincere intellectual stimulus that Chiuminatto – himself a finished musician and later an academic – must have drawn from the correspondence with a young but already well-read contemporary of his, who would not coincidentally go on to occupy a significant place in Italy’s cultural landscape of the first half of the 20th century and beyond. What is undeniable is Anthony’s devotion

to Cesare (they soon start using first names), which also gives rise to enjoyable anecdotes such as that of the typewriter: eager to respond to Pavese, Chiuminatto writes night and day, pounding away noisily on the keys. His neighbour complains, but the musician intends to ignore him, except that “the ole son-of-a-So-and-So goes to the police and they serve me with an order whereby I am forbidden to typewrite after sunset” (AC, 22.09.1931, p. 146). The ‘noise’ created by Pavese’s translations almost got his American correspondent arrested: it makes for an ironic parallel with Pavese being deported for his antifascist activity, when he only agreed to hide incriminating letters to please a woman he loved (cf. Lauretano, 2008 for the differing opinions on the story) and, especially, with the censoring of *Americana* (1940/1942), which only featured one translation by Pavese but consecrated him as a militant Americanist, at a time when his first infatuation with that generation of American novelists was over and he was already starting to turn his attention back to Europe and its classical myths.

In summary, the relationship between the two correspondents appears unbalanced in both its purposes and motivations, resembling a pure business relationship (*un mestiere*) for the Italian and something more akin to a friendship for the American. This is made evident by how the relationship ended. It had begun out of a need of Pavese’s, with his naive request for a dictionary of slang that did not exist at the time, at least as he conceived it (if one excludes Wood and Goddard’s, 1926, 64-page dictionary):

as the most pressing thing, would you be so kind as to go fetching, whether there is in USA a book – a dictionary, a treatise, something – about modern American language, which can enable me to understand better your contemporary writers? [...] I want such a book, as the air I am breathing. Can you fetch it? (CP, 20.11.1929, p. 26).

The reply he received shows all of Chiuminatto’s dedication and generosity:

I am sorry to say that there is not as yet a book of any kind which will explain to you the usage of American slang. [...] If ever I should hear of some book or other of this kind, I shall get it and send it to you; for the present, Mr. Pavese, send me a list of the phrases you do not understand and I’ll be this book for you (AC, 24.12.1929, pp. 29-30).

The end of the correspondence displays its purely professional, opportunistic nature: in 1932 Pavese published *Riso nero*, the Italian version

of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark laughter* (about which he had long and thoroughly consulted with Chiuminatto); the same year their letters began to thin out; 1933 saw one letter sent from Turin in January and one from Chicago in March. The latter ended with Chiuminatto's enthusiastic closing line "[u]ntil next time, then, believe me your old pal clean down to the wishbone" (AC, 08.03.1930, p. 171), to which Pavese would never reply. Pietralunga (2007: 21) reports that Chiuminatto, interviewed by Lorenzo Mondo in 1966, "speculates that the epistolary exchange may have ended because Pavese had obtained a level of self-sufficiency and was no longer in need of books or linguistic explanations primarily related to American slang". The abrupt interruption also fits well into Pavese's approach to translation as pure business (trade, labour, *mestiere*).

How, then, to frame the Pavese-Chiuminatto relationship with respect to their translation work? According to O'Brien (2011: 17), "[c]ollaboration can occur between translators and any one of these other agents [authors, publishers, agencies, translators] or between two or more translators." Although Pavese's editorial role with Einaudi (beginning with his contribution to *La Cultura*, 1934-1936) was not long to come in time and he might already have a clear idea as to which American authors and novels he wished to see translated into Italian, with respect to his correspondence with Chiuminatto, he ought to be regarded only as a translator. Indeed, as a professional translator, he would do as his publishers bid him, e.g. when Bemporad, the famous Florentine publishing house, asked him to translate Sinclair Lewis's *Our Mr Wrenn* in a hurry, in the wake of the Nobel prize for literature won by its author in 1930. Chiuminatto, in fact, contributes to Pavese's translation of *Dark laughter* in the manner of a present-day terminologist. He provides Pavese with the key to all those non-standard words that make up what is possibly the novel's main stylistic feature, and without which he could not have translated it. In this regard, then, is Chiuminatto to be seen as an actual active contributor to the translation work, in an almost contemporary way: similarly to those who, in a translation company, work on the glossaries that will then be provided to the translators proper, who in turn differ from the post-editors. Clearly, he is no professional translator, nor is he a linguist. However, as a clever and educated person, he 'thinks' like a translator, for instance when he asks Pavese to provide him with a context for the words whose meaning he wants explained – the first question that any translator who can be defined as such would ask, when faced with a lexical request:

[a]s for the slang phrases you sent me, well, I'll fix them up as soon as I can. I notice that there are some phrases that make it almost imperative that I have the book, for standing alone, as they do, it is almost impossible to give them a proper interpretation (AC, 15.03.1930, p. 56).

It was actually quite naive of Pavese to send him long lists of individual terms and expressions to translate, without any co-text or context of sorts. Operationally speaking, then, Chiuminatto's contribution to the Italian version of *Dark laughter* must be acknowledged as not only significant but as even indispensable to the comprehension of the source text. As a terminologist, however, he alone cannot put his name to a complete literary translation, since he only dealt with one linguistic level – the lexicon – and only insofar as the non-standard words. The syntactic and stylistic rendering, the translation's flavour, as well as that of all the standard lexicon of his understanding, are Pavese's, and Pavese's alone.

It ought to be added that it was the Italian writer himself that completely excluded Chiuminatto, albeit transparently, from the editorial process. Indeed, he gladly informs him of his successes as both an essayist and a translator, thus making it clear that the auxiliary function of the American correspondent is to be understood within the scope of their personal relationship, and will not be acknowledged editorially. After all, Pavese did in fact treat his translating as a business, both for his economic return (fatherless since the age of five, his mother died in 1930 and he had to support himself) and to try and make a name for himself in the field of American literary studies with his translations as well as with his essays. Signing his translations is therefore paramount to him: his tenure as much as his prestige depend on them, and there is no room for outsourcing the translation work and sharing either the fees or the fame. Not that Chiuminatto would have needed it, it is possible to speculate; perhaps he would have liked it, but no indications emerge from the epistolary in this regard. In other words, if Cordingly and Frigau Manning (2017) hypothesise that a plurality of translators can weaken the already diminished authority of the translator, as well as his creativity, the Pavese-Chiuminatto case certainly highlights Pavese's fear of losing authority. He nonetheless has no problems privately acknowledging Chiuminatto's great contribution:

[s]ay, I'm becoming a true authority about American literature, I begin to feel chesty with my fellow-students, and especially with co-

eds. But, let's on: it's you the fellow who is doing half the work (CP, 10.06.1930, p. 80).

Indeed, there was never an issue with trust between them: Pavese trusted his correspondent blindly on slang and other problematic lexicon: in other words, if “[t]rust is identified as a sort of defence strategy against the degree of uncertainty that characterises any translation” (Agorni 2021: 9), then Chiuminatto’s role contributed to reducing such uncertainty to a degree at which Pavese may be confident enough to venture his own lexical (re)formulations based on the American musicologist’s explanations that were never (could not be) questioned. However, back to why Chiuminatto’s work was not acknowledged, the hypothesis is that, in 1930, Pavese’s fear of losing authorship must still be seen as at least on a par with his fear of losing an income. Thus, the money and time he spends in corresponding with Chiuminatto must be understood as a professional investment which shall cease, as a matter of fact, the moment he does not need it anymore (1933) – cf. Pym (1998: 166), “Could it be that certain social groups become linguistic mediators in search of enhanced status then abandon that role as soon as it is no longer advantageous?”.

To sum up, in Pavese’s translations from American English, especially *Dark laughter* by Sherwood Anderson, Anthony Chiuminatto played an operational role ‘connected’ with translation – of non-standard terms and expressions – but he cannot, even according to today’s standards in the translation industry, be considered an actual co-translator. He may at most be deemed a translation operator, involved in the “production” cycle (Cordingly and Frigau Manning 2017), which is collaborative by definition. Having therefore to decide whether theirs was a professional collaboration focused on translation, the answer is certainly affirmative; however, *Riso nero* cannot properly be defined a ‘collaborative translation’ but, at most, the result of a ‘translation collaboration’.

5. Pavese the cloven Americanist?

Regarding the implications of his collaboration with Chiuminatto for Pavese’s role as a translator and Americanist, the former cannot possibly in any way have undermined, even in retrospect, the latter. The label of ‘Americanist’ translator attached to Pavese is part of the anti-fascist aura ideologically built around him in the decades following his death and, as has

already been argued, has long needed to be redefined (Grego 2023). However, if Pavese's Americanism is to be re-sized, it is certainly not because of the necessary yet not sufficient contribution that Chiuminatto made to the translation of *Dark laughter*. One can say that Pavese himself, in his letters, diary and, now, American epistolary, explains why: for example, by showing us how, as early as 1933, his initial infatuation with contemporary American novelists was already over. Indeed, whether based on his long-established and enduring fame as an Americanist, or even seen from a contemporary perspective redefining his love for American writers, Pavese's part as a connoisseur and facilitator of things American, who introduced them into Italy ("a true authority about American literature", CP, 10.06.1930, p. 80), does not seem to be in danger, for at least three reasons. Firstly, Chiuminatto's help was exquisitely lexical and concerning a single published book. Secondly, the weight of terminology in literary translation is not equivalent to that in specialised fields. Thirdly, more often than not, from Chiuminatto's explanations, Pavese mostly drew inspiration for very personal renderings, only occasionally using the versions of his correspondent *verbatim*.⁶ Additionally, Pavese's sincere interest in the American language and culture is not in question: suffice it to consider the famous reflection he made on slang, even within the limits of his expertise, in one of his letters to Chiuminatto, and to which Pietralunga (2007) gives new value, by adding Chiuminatto's reply to it. Pavese sketches his own idea of slang, venturing a heartfelt as much as daring parallel with Italian dialects, in his syntactically correct and even lexically nuanced English. Although widely cited by literary critics, it is worth quoting it in its entirety, but reading it this time from a linguistic and translational perspective:

You say: this word is slang, and this is classic. But is not slang only the bulk of new English words and expressions continually shaped by living people, as for all languages in all times? I mean, there is not a line to be drawn between the English and the slang words, as two different languages usually spoken by different people and only in certain cases used together.

That book you know, *Dark Laughter*, for instance, is written in English, but there are numberless slang-expressions in it and they are not as French words in an Italian book, but they are a natural part of

⁶ The author is currently working on a linguistic analysis of Cesare Pavese's translation of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark laughter*.

that language. And I said always English, but I should have said American for I think there is not a slang and a classic language, but there are two diversified languages, the English and the American ones. As slang is the living part of all languages, English has become American by it, that is the two languages have developed themselves separately by means of their respective slangs.

My conclusion is then that there are not a slang and a classic language. (CP, 12.01.1930, p. 33)

The answer of Chiuminatto, supposedly the American authority, expresses other ideas, partly understandable, partly equally confused – certainly not as structured into a poetic vision (revolving around the classics, the livelihood of speech, the freshness of dialect/slang) that in Pavese’s mind already seemed fully formed as far back as 1930:

I shall refer myself now to the paragraph of your letter where you spoke of slang, as not being separated from what I shall call real American. Well, you are right in what you say, Mr. Pavese, save that what I wanted to say before was that very many forms of slang are not of good use, that is, they are insulting forms of speech. When I speak of classic English I mean that kind of English which was current years and years ago and which still remains to-day, even though it may have been even slang at that time. When I speak of slang now, though, I mean that form of English which is current and yet new to us, something that is produced in our times. Oh, I agree with you that real American and American slang now go hand-in-hand, but we are still in the period where we distinguish slang from what used to be our American language. Get me? I merely called one form ‘classic’ and another ‘slang’ so that you would not think that the former were something relatively new or the latter a part of our one-time English. (AC, 01.02.1930, p. 40)

If, on the other hand, we consider the almost superhuman myth of Pavese the translator, according to which he alone, at most with Elio Vittorini, imported American novels into Italy in a rebellious drive against the fascist regime and toward freedom (cf. Fernandez 1969), this indeed ought to be cloven, but only to derive a vision of his work that is closer to reality. Pavese does not act alone: as a translator, he takes advantage of at least Anthony Chiuminatto for *Dark laughter* and Libero Novara for *Moby Dick* (cf. Pavese, 1931: 95-100); as an editor-in-chief, he had to interact with both publishers

and translators within the productive cycle mentioned above, which naturally underlies collaborative translation understood as a process and social practice (Grego 2010). Nonetheless, Pavese stays on as ‘the’ unquestioned translator of *Dark laughter*, as well as of the other fifteen English-language novels he translated into Italian. Considerably helped on the lexical level by Chiuminatto, the latter remains a supporting actor, a co-star, a collaborator, but not a co-translator, since, “[i]f all translation is collaborative, not all collaborators are translators” (Cordingly and Frigau Manning 2017: 23).

6. Conclusions

Three are the concluding reflections. The first falls within the scope of trying to demystify Pavese’s translation activity as a conscious anti-fascist operation (Grego 2023). Only by removing the ideological aura of the committed intellectual, a member of the Italian Communist Party, an anti-regime activist and a bootlegger of *Americana* – a trend that is already well underway with respect to his works (cf., e.g., the reflections surrounding Mondo 1990’s so-called *Taccuino segreto*) – is it possible to reframe, from a contemporary perspective, the translatory acts of Cesare Pavese and the indisputable cultural role they played. Exploring his translations in the light of the rich corpus of annotations he left us – in letters, diaries and essays – is the philological operation to carry out, and the study of the Pavese-Chiuminatto epistolary falls precisely within this purpose: to focus on his translations not only as an editorial choice, but as an operational translation process, starting from the texts and placing the texts at the centre. In this sense, Pym’s (1998: 37) suggestion, within the historical perspective in Translation Studies, that we should “find out why the work of translators might have been important in the past” and what its relevance is to the present is also adhered to: Pavese was indeed a great intercultural operator, only not for the reasons that intellectuals have been indicating usually, and the awareness thereof can contribute to reassess and re-appreciate Pavese’s translating role in contemporary times.

The second reflection is oriented towards a recognition of Chiuminatto’s work as that of an excellent translation collaborator: “I’m with you now, Cesare, so take advantage. I may be the only one you know in America – but this old Buddy of yours is going to be the whole of America to you if he can!” (AC, 12.03.1931, p. 128), as well as a devout

fellow: “I’m still at your service, you know – and I only wish I were a consul or something like that so that I could do more to get you into America” (AC, 14.11.1932, p. 162). Differently put, acknowledging the musicologist’s work does not downsize that of Pavese; rather, it returns a more complete view of his profile as a translator. It is also a due recognition of the merits of the Italian-American who, although jokingly, explicitly asked Pavese to remember him, both professionally (“[i]f you should ever be asked to write your ‘memoirs’ some day for one of those syndicated magazines, please don’t forget to give me a look-in on the immortality!”, AC, 30.06.1930, p. 84), and personally (“[w]ell, Cesare, keep the thread of my plans and write me often. Anything you want – books, records or what have you – just remember me!”, AC, 06.01.1932, p. 155).

The third and final reflection necessarily addresses the positioning of this specific epistolary within the broader notion of collaborative translation, in which collaboration “effectively explodes the notion of translation as a unitary activity, breaking it down into a set of parallel practices and corresponding roles” (Agorni 2005: 827). It has been argued that Anthony Chiuminatto cannot be considered a real co-translator, although he can be seen to have played the parallel role of translation collaborator. Indeed, this does not mean that the Pavese-Chiuminatto interaction cannot still be placed within the practice of collaborative translation and contribute to it, since “[t]he real potential for collaborative translation as a critical concept and tool lies not in its drawing attention to the different roles played by actors in a process, but in its capacity to complicate our assumptions about translation” (Cordingly and Frigau Manning 2017: 24). It has also been argued here that Cesare Pavese, in translating the American novelists of his time, did not make a conscious political choice but one about ‘poetics’. Similarly, this too represents an act of collaborative translation which, if “[u]nderstood as a poetics, [...] surpasses the epistemology of the individual, offering instead various dialectics of imbrication and fusion that subtend and produces collective work” (*ibid.*). Incidentally, it was the very imbrication that Pavese sought for himself between American culture, meant as a “great laboratory [...] of work and research” (Pavese 1947: 3), and his own writing. Finally, since “[a] poetics of collaboration will draw attention to the motivations and social forces that animate collaborative projects and the cultural and political statements they embody” (Cordingly and Frigau Manning 2017: 24), even if Pavese’s translating from American may have been no openly anti-fascist operation, it does not mean that it was not a deeply and intrinsically

‘political’ choice: in its manner of exploring the other, in its linguistic and cultural approach and in its ultimately universal curiosity about all that is human.

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