

## **The (In)visible Publisher in Translations: The Publisher's Multiple Translational Voices**

Siri Nergaard

In this article I explore the roles of the several agents involved in the process of publishing a translated work. The hypothesis is that these agents participate actively in many and different ways in shaping a translation's final result and perception: they are all in some way translating the text and could in a wide sense be called translators. Through a theoretical framework taken from Translation Studies and History of Books, and by the use of Genette's notion paratext, I look at translations of Norwegian Literature into Italian, with a particular attention to the publishing house Iperborea. I conclude with some remarks of a political nature on the translators' role in the translation-publishing process.

Keywords: paratext, partiality, publishing process, history of books, politics of translation

Dans cet article, j'examine le rôle de plusieurs agents impliqués dans la publication d'une œuvre de traduction. L'hypothèse avancée, c'est que ces agents contribuent activement de multiples et diverses manières à déterminer l'œuvre finale ainsi que la perception qu'on en a. Tous, d'une façon ou d'une autre, traduisent le texte et pourraient être considérés comme étant des traducteurs, au sens large du terme. Partant d'un cadre théorique inspiré de la traductologie et de l'histoire du livre et utilisant la notion de paratexte, formulée par Genette, j'analyse des traductions italiennes d'œuvres littéraires norvégiennes, en portant une attention particulière à la maison d'édition Iperborea. En conclusion, je fais quelques remarques de nature politique sur le rôle des traducteurs dans le processus de la traduction-publication.

Keywords: paratexte, partialité, processus de publication, histoire du livre, politique de la traduction

In this article I explore the roles of the several agents involved in the long process of publishing a translated work.<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis is that these agents participate actively in many and different ways in shaping a translation's final result and perception: they are all in some way translating the text and could in a wide sense be called translators. After presenting my theoretical framework I look at examples of translations of Norwegian Literature into Italian, with particular attention to the publications by Iperborea, the Italian publishing house specialized in the publishing of literature from North European countries. I conclude with some remarks of a political nature on the translators' role in the translation-publishing process.

Traditionally we have been used to thinking that the main, if not the only, responsibility of a translation is accorded to the translator, and that what we define as a translation is exclusively the written text that has a named author, and that is being translated by a (not always) named translator.

Other elements constituting a published text, whether verbal or not, such as cover, title, blurbs and images are seldom considered as parts of the translation, even if they have gone through a similar process of elaboration, transformation and adaptation to the new linguistic and cultural context of the text/translation itself. For clarity's sake I distinguish between 'the text itself' and 'the whole text,' whereby with the first I mean the written text by a named author submitted for translation, while with the second I intend the whole textual product, or the book, including all its paratextual elements. It should moreover be clear that the intent is to consider the textual product as a whole. The concept of paratext, and its division into epitext and peritext, will be used as developed by Gérard Genette, that is, to designate the zone or "threshold," "empirically made up of a heterogeneous group of practices and discourses,"<sup>2</sup> or as Philippe Lejeune puts it, "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text."<sup>3</sup> Although translations are left out of Genette's work, his concepts represent a good framework to face the questions we are dealing with here concerning the complexity of text and paratext as parts of a published translated book. My use of Genette's concepts will nevertheless be slightly different.

In the field of Translation Studies we are familiar with the numerous case studies of single translations or corpora of translations, where the aim has been to discover how and why translations have been done and how specific translation problems have been solved. Translations have been compared to previous translations of the same text, in different epochs, in different languages; we have been reading discussions on the translator's poetics and on whether the translator should domesticate or foreignize the original text. Common to almost all of these studies is that they are studies of published translations, but often without consideration of other aspects than the text itself. The cases where a broader vision of the translated text has been adopted, one which takes into consideration paratextual elements and publishing policies, are much rarer.

With the growth of Translation Studies and its contextualisation of translation in culture and history, translations have been more and more considered as representatives, not only of the languages involved, but of the cultures that produce them, and among which they are "travelling."

Some scholars, for instance Bassnett and Lefevere,<sup>4</sup> only to mention some of the first, have started to consider translations as the result of ideological constraints, recognizing that translations never take place in a void, but are executed by translators who are continuously conditioned, not only by linguistic limitations, but as much by their social and cultural environment, which is always ideological. In Translation Studies today, we recognize that the translators' work is influenced by, if not dependent upon, the time and space in which the translation takes place, ideological factors, power relations, and other figures around them, such as costumers, publishers, institutions and readers.

Actually, the role of the publishing houses is sometimes included in these studies as one of the ideological constraints, but most often the role of the publisher is considered very limitedly only as the deciding power that chooses the texts to be translated and how to translate them. Rarely have publishing policies or publishing ideologies been problematized, and questions about what exactly the publishers do with the translated books they publish in terms of the paratext, are seldom included in these studies. When I use the word *publisher*, I refer to all the different voices involved in the translation-publication process of a book under the responsibility of a publishing house.

The fact that translations today are considered as cultural practices strictly intertwined with the context of production and reception is important for a broader understanding of what a translation is, and for recognition of its deep connection to both social and cultural change and stability. As I see it, there is nevertheless a paradox in this understanding, or at least in the dominant discourse on translation: On the one hand we recognize that translations are part of a broader frame of conditions and constraints (linguistic, cultural, social, economic, and ideological), and that we have to consider the role played by extra-linguistic and extra-textual factors if we want to understand how translations act in our cultures. On the other hand we continue to consider translations primarily for their textual dimension – and here I refer to ‘the text itself’ – with a strictly linguistic, or better, verbal-centred approach, searching for answers on how translations are formed and how they work. This part of the text, the text itself, is considered to be the translator's responsibility, and seldom do

those who study translations take into account all the other elements constituting a book, or the publishing policy of the publishing house producing and selling the book. The paradox stems from the fact that we are contributing both to a widening up and a narrowing down of the field: history, culture, and ideology are included in the analysis of the translated text, but the translated text continues to be considered exclusively in its narrow verbal components. The fact that texts' words have a physical presence through typographical elements such as font and layout, that they are presented materially either on paper or electronic devices, and that these material elements might change radically from original to translation, is almost always ignored. Further elements that go beyond the written text itself, such as the front and back covers, images, illustrations, and fore- or after words are seldom included in the studies, as if none of these factors were thought to have any impact on the interpretation and reception of the text itself. The situation is even worse if we take a step outside the borders of the book and its material components, for instance to the critique and reviews of the book, its position on the shelves in a bookstore, and interviews or correspondence with the author. All these elements – the epitext according to Genette's terminology – have to do with questions regarding publishing policies (politics, ideologies, and economies), that are connected to translation, since they create the conditions under which translations are executed. One of my concerns in this paper is to show why analyses of translations have to consider *all* the elements involved in the composition of a text (book), not only those being part of the text itself, the verbal ones, those under the translator's (main) responsibility. In doing so, I am trying to go beyond the limiting perspective with which we still tend to consider translations, the one that is excluding all the other aspects that surround, accompany, sustain, and promote its words, forgetting, or ignoring that all the elements that are involved in the shaping of a text (translation) are giving meaning to the text (translation) itself. These elements – the 'substance' of the text – together create a complex semiotic body that we should call a text in its broad sense, where all its semiotic components are taken into account. Said in another way, this 'broad text' should always be considered in its multimodality, i.e., as a text consisting of different semiotic systems that together

shape it and condition its interpretation and reception. In such a holistic perspective all the operations done to a text in translation, creating and publishing a book, will be considered as translational.

As said above I will refer widely to Genette's concept of *paratext*. While his work is fundamental for establishing the significant relation between text and paratext in order to evaluate "the paratext in all its forms [as] a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of [...] the text"<sup>5</sup> my effort will be to go one step further and consider the text ('the text itself') and paratext *together*, as elements that *together* constitute the semiotic whole of translation that we have to take into consideration for a complete understanding of what translation is and how translation 'works.' It is with this kind of conception that we are going to explore the presence of the many *voices* in translation.

### **Theoretical Assumptions**

After acknowledging the importance of using a broad semiotic, multimodal approach to consider translations, the next step is to recognize the professional figures responsible for the different elements constituting the complex semiotic product that a published translated book is. In this paper I concentrate on the voices that participate in the publishing process of a translation, with the conviction that the translator is only one element – and often a weak one in terms of decision power – in this process. As Urpo Kovala rightly puts it, "[t]he translator is only one of the mediators between the original work and the reader of its translation."<sup>6</sup> I explore the different phases in the publishing process, and I try to show how the different agents influence and determine the final translated book as it appears on the shelves in a bookstore or in the lists of internet booksellers. These agents are also translators, since, as Cecilia Alvstad asserts, "[t]he creation of paratexts is a process of translation in a broad sense."<sup>7</sup> But before I proceed to this explorative step, let me come with some further theoretical and methodological assumptions that constitute the basis for how I pursue this work and for the conclusions I end with.

In 2002 Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler wrote that Translation Studies was moving towards a new turn: after the cultural turn of the early 1990s, a *power turn* was taking over. Translation among cultures always involved questions that have to do with cultural influence, dominance, assertion, authority, transformation resistance, that is, questions of power. The power turn in translation studies does not only mean that one recognizes how power relations are guiding all decisions, it also signifies that one recognizes how powerful translations are in creating, transforming and stabilizing cultural representations.

To illustrate how power is an always underlying factor in translation, I will refer to a connected concept in Tymoczko and Gentzler's work, that is *partiality*:

Indeed partiality is what differentiates translations, enabling them to participate in the dialectic of power, the ongoing process of political discourse, and strategies for social change. Such representations and commitments are apparent from analyses of translators' choices, word by word, page by page, and text by text, and they are also often demonstrable in the paratextual materials that surround translations, including footnotes, reviews, literary criticism, and so forth. The very words associated with politics and ideology used here (i.e., partiality, partisan, participate) suggest that the partial nature of translations is what makes them also an exercise of power.<sup>8</sup>

When we consider the publishing process of translation, we see that partiality is an ever-present factor, from the *selection* of the works to translate, and of the translator to whom the translation is commissioned, to all the partial choices that the translator's decisions includes, through the decisions on how to *assemble* the text in translation (in a series, with a translator's foreword, or with footnotes), its *fabrication* (paper back or hard cover, paper quality etc.), and its production and structuration.

*Falsification, refusal of information, and counterfeiting* are further examples of partiality, according to Gentzler and Tymoczko.<sup>9</sup> Actually, the various decisions taken in a translation-publication process might also consist in an explicit (sometimes inexplicit or implied) will to change the nature of the text in translation, in order to obtain a desired result. As we shall see, (partial) choices are often taken, or decided, by the publisher, rather than the translator, and they take place both in 'the text itself' as in the paratext.

In my exploration of the editorial voices in translation, the power factor is extremely crucial and I include in my discussion Gentzler and Tymoczko's statement about how power is an underlying force when one considers the impact of ideology on translation decisions, how institutions influence the same translation decisions, how the market guides what gets translated, and even, in certain circumstances, how it influences how texts are to be translated in order to follow market tendencies and demands. The economical factor probably plays a larger role than readers usually think: publishers have to sell their books. And therefore, economic considerations – depending on market and costs – condition every stage of the publishing-translating process: from the selection of the book to translate; the translator to engage; the proof reader or designer to engage (if outsourced); paper to use, and the printer to use. Single translation choices may also be conditioned by the economics of the market: the publisher may consider one translation strategy more suited for selling than another, or may prefer translations without footnotes, or other paratextual elements considered as less reader friendly and therefore difficult to sell. The variables are many, depending on text genre, type of publication and publishing house, but in general I believe one can say that decisions that have to do directly with translation also depend on the economics of the situation.

The next factor I want to include as an underlying assumption for my discourse, also present in Gentzler and Tymoczko's work, and closely connected to that of power, is that of *fragmentation*. Scholars who have taken the cultural turn and poststructuralists tend to hold that there is no real, whole, original, or essential meaning of a text to be captured, and that any reading, interpretation, or translation is inevitably fragmented, and again, partial, and unstable. The poststructuralist assumption that language itself is unstable, that there is no concrete truth to find, or no absolute origin, implies that what we can find in a text is always fragmentary. This is probably even truer when it comes to translations. Rejecting the possibility of reaching determinate knowledge means that *gaps, inconsistencies, leftovers, silences* and *randomness* are natural facets of translation. For our discourse this means that no translation is ever complete, neutral, or objective, and translation scholars who have taken the power turn also take into consideration the non-wanted, non-intended,

non-programmed aspects of a text and its reception. Translations are executed and published by human beings who are situated historically and socially; they have their sympathies, strengths, and insights as well as their hang-ups, weak points, and oversights. Omissions and absences might be explained by the historical moment in which the translation is achieved, that leads the translator/publisher to avoid certain choices that give room for certain (alternative) interpretations. But many translation-publishing choices might also be made simply due to random factors, that might guide a publisher's choices in terms of which literature to publish: he or she can happen to have friend in a foreign publishing house and start to translate and publish the books from that foreign list; or he or she might have received a very good offer at a book fair. The important thing to remember is that many decisions in a publishing house (as elsewhere) are not always the results of a pondered programme with a clear target, and that unpredicted features play a certain role and might be the (simple) explanation of many decisions. I find fragmentation together with partiality helpful categories, to recognize translations both as results of thoughtful (power) decisions, and as remainders outside the control of the translator or of any other agent in the translation process. The responsibilities of the various aspects of fragmentation and partiality – both of those wanted and those not – are shared among the various participants involved in the translation process, where the translator is only one of many. The notions of fragmentation and partiality can ultimately remind us that all the different agents involved in the translation-publishing process may have their own agendas, each of them delivering a partial, and maybe even partisan, representation of the text. These different agendas can be even conflicting, resulting in an incoherent or contradictory outcome.

In more general terms this article is influenced by tendencies in fields of research such as the history of books<sup>10</sup> and the sociology of literature, where the material aspects of translation and publication are taken into consideration as significant and decisive elements for meaning, interpretation and reception. This signifies that the literary *system* (formed by the publishing industry, literary critique, authors, and the press) in which translation takes place is acknowledged



to have a controlling role with respect, for example, to inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, recognizing that discourses are also material and not only textual phenomena, studies in the history of books are investigating how specific contexts of publication participate in constructing meaning. According to Tore Rem,<sup>11</sup> new research in the history of books is characterized by three premises, which I think should be included in any consideration of the voices involved in the translation-publishing process: a text is always situated materially, historically and socially; a text's physical form produces meaning; and a book's physical form is created and exists in a social sphere. From the history of books we can also find hypotheses on why the tendency to concentrate on the text itself, at the expense of the other elements of a book, is so strong in our societies. Much research in the history of books has been dedicated to the role of the author, and, inspired by Foucault's statement about the author as a cultural construction, history of the book scholars recognize how the almost total centrality given to the text itself, instead of to the whole book, is connected to the privileged role given to the author in our cultures. Modern Western societies have concentrated their focus on the author function, considering him/her as a unique creator and genius of literary works, while all the other functions participating in constituting a book have occupied secondary positions.

Pierre Bourdieu's contribution to the sociology of books is also worth mentioning, since his contextualisation of the "literary field" takes into consideration the ways in which individual and collective strategies influence both the production and reception of literary works.<sup>12</sup> This means that the author's text, and the book in which it is published, are analyzed in the broader context of all the 'voices' involved in its generation.

One of my main concerns, that paratextual elements have a significant role in creating meaning, is clearly part of the basic premises of both the history of books and the sociology of books, and should be included more fully in translation studies. On the other hand, despite the evident pertinence of approaches from these disciplines, we have to register that questions concerning translation occupy a rather marginal position in these studies.

## **The Publishing Process**

Let us now briefly consider the various stages of the translation and publishing process of a book in order to identify the single agents of its different steps and their responsibilities.

The first official stage of this process includes several phases, starting with the buying the rights of a book. Today literary agents have the most significant role in this process, but the ‘scouts’ that pick out foreign titles of possible interest for the publishing house are also important. Annual international book fairs – among which the most important are Frankfurt and London –, where publishers from all over the world – mainly represented by their foreign rights directors – meet, are moments of intense activity in terms of contracting, promotion, selling and buying rights. In a second phase, when the rights have been acquired, new figures take control of the book, mainly the series editor, the content editor, and later the copy editor. This is the case in big publishing houses, while the same person may cover all these roles in smaller publishing houses. In this phase the translation is commissioned to a translator, who in most cases is an external figure to the publishing house often working for various publishing houses. In the third phase, the translator’s work is controlled by editors and copy editors that more often than not work inside the publishing houses and represent more directly the publisher’s voice and ideology. In *Publishing: Principles & Practice*, Richard Guthrie writes, “[c]opyeditors may have been briefed to make texts consistent with an overall house style.”<sup>13</sup>

There is no rule or standard praxis for how the contracting and collaboration between the publisher (series editor, content editor, copy editor, and proof reader) and translator proceed, but very often the discrepancies in power relations between publisher and translator are evident: generally one can say that all final decisions are made by the publisher. The publisher, in this case represented by the editor, might intervene on any choice made by the translator and might also refuse the translation if he/she finds it unsatisfactory. In general, the translators are asked to translate a text, and if their work is accepted, they have the right to control the proofs before publishing.

After the phase of control and proofreading of the translator's work is finished, very often he or she disappears without taking any part in the next phase, even if it is a process involving decisions that impact directly on the text/translation itself, such as whether or not include footnotes or endnotes, glossaries, prefaces, forewords, or afterwords. There are of course examples of translators involved in the construction of the paratexts, but as far as these textual elements do not involve the translator's notes, or fore- or after word, the norm is that the translator's contribution to the publishing process finishes with the 'translation itself.' An illustrative example is the choice of the title for the translation: the translator may propose and suggest, but the publisher has the right to make the final decision.

These and the following statements are of a very general character, since the legislation, rules and practices vary much from country to country, as well as from publishing house to publishing house, depending also on the nature of the book in translation and the fame and prestige of both publisher and translator.

The next stage in the process has to do with the 'packaging' of the text, and here we enter into the field of paratext, and particularly into the *peritext*, i.e., the elements related to the physical book itself: how the pages are designed and typeset, as they pass through numerous stages of considerations and choices, necessarily give an identity to the book, an identity that conveys meaning. The 'meaningful' elements that might be included before and after the 'text itself,' include the title page, publication details, dedication, table of contents, list of figures, preface, foreword, acknowledgments, introduction, afterword, glossary, appendices, references, end notes, bibliography, and index. Some of these are always present, but others are introduced by choice, according to decisions made by the author and/or the publisher, seldom by the translator.

To set out a list of the different stages in the publishing process, I have been consulting different recent publications on publishing, and what struck me is the almost total absence of any reference to translations or the translator. As we can see from the following figure of the publishing process, taken from John B. Thompson's *Merchants of Culture*,<sup>14</sup> the fact that many published books are

translations is ignored. This omission can be explained partly by the fact that I am referring to books written in English, on the UK and USA market, where notoriously only three per cent of the books published are translations. However, even in texts on publishing in other countries where translations are more numerous, the translation aspect occupies a very marginal position, as if translations did not represent a considerable/meaningful aspect of the publishing process.

The following figure (figure 1) illustrates the tasks or functions in a publishing process, presenting them as a “Publishing value chain” where each link “purportedly adds some ‘value’ in the process.”<sup>15</sup> Apparently, the translation is not considered such a value.

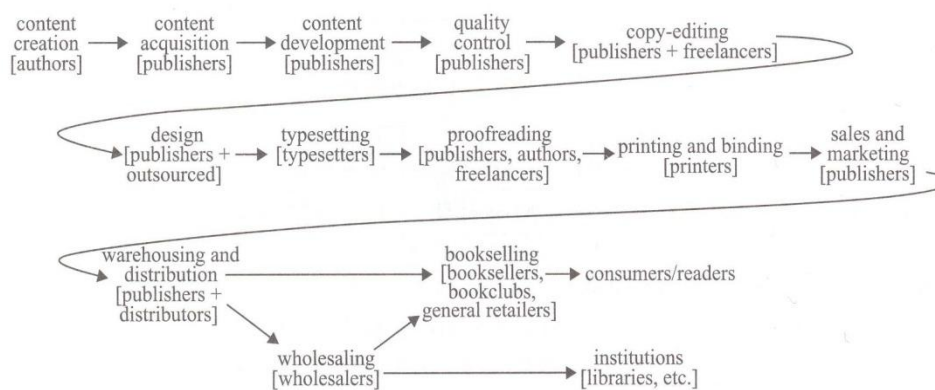


Figure 1: John B. Thompson’s illustration of the “publishing value chain”

When we move on to aspects that have to do with the design of a book, its materiality becomes even more important; as historians of books underscore, these features are also meaning and content bearing. The book’s format, size, typography and layout have the power to communicate with readers before they even read a word of the book, creating expectations and initial interpretations of its content. A cover, through its design, paper quality, and image, can, according to current stylistic conventions in the target culture, suggest if the content is popular, intellectual, easy, serious, or romantic. The category in which the publisher places a translated book through these stylistic features might be different from that of the original: it may have passed through a ‘translation’ process too.

Leaving the physical limits of the book and dealing – in a next stage – with its “life” among buyers and readers, bookstores and in libraries, in reviews and critiques in the press and other media, in public readings, festivals, tours and awards, we are dealing with what Genette calls the *epitext*, the external factors related to the book. This is the space of marketing, selling and promotion (press agency), communication and distribution, where new agents enter into the process. They may be directing expectation, perception, reading and interpretation in certain directions instead of others. Actually, a reader’s first knowledge of a book very often takes place in the epitext, reading a review or seeing a commercial of the book. Even if Genette does not give the same attention to the epitext as he does to the peritext, he recognizes the power of these extratextual elements, and he even conceives as factual paratexts those features “that consist not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Translated Book: Epitext and Peritext**

The many and different voices active in the publishing process of a translation having been identified, let us now look at the single elements in Genette’s paradigm of paratext to ask what exactly is the role of the translator. Questions include if and how the translator’s voice is present in and around the book, both in the peritext and in the epitext, if and how the translator and his/her translation is mentioned, and if and how the translator has any say outside the ‘translation itself.’ My hypothesis is a double one: on the one hand that the translator and his/her translation occupy a marginal, if not a non-existent position, in the paratext of the majority of translated books; and, on the other hand, that all the peritextual and epitextual elements are themselves elements of translational operations and need to be considered as part of the translation process. These paratextual translational elements are not executed by a translator, but by the publisher, through all his/her different voices and practices. An additional question here is whether the fact that a book is a translation is in some way thematized in the publication, or if it is presented as if it were an original text.

With respect to the peritext, starting with the external parts of a translated book, the questions to be considered include whether or not the front cover and jacket signal in some way that the book is a translation, and whether or not the translator's name is present. The same questions can be asked for the back cover and the flaps. In these zones of a book we are used to finding a short biography of the author, extracts of review, and promotional blurbs; and again, is the translation mentioned, is the translator's name mentioned? Some books have a wrapper or a band covering parts of the book's cover, usually containing publicity. Does it mention in any way the translation/translator?

Entering into the book, the first peritextual element is the title page that displays the author's name, the book's title, together with other information on the publication, such as copyright and year of publication. In cases where the book is a translation, the title page should, according to conventions, and sometimes to regulations, also contain the original title of the book, the year of publication of the original, and the translator's name. Interestingly, there is a significant variety in how this kind of information is conveyed, sometimes the language from which the book is translated is mentioned too, and sometimes not. Therefore, there may be cases in which it is almost impossible for readers to understand the linguistic origin of a translated text, unless they have specific geographic knowledge and can locate the place of publication, cited on the same title page. As for the other elements of the peritext, already mentioned, such as the foreword, introduction, notes, afterword, and glossary, we should again ask if the translator's voice is present, and how. Is there a fore- or afterword by the translator? Are there notes, glossaries or other elements produced by the translator?

Leaving the peritext, and looking at the epitext, that is, the external factors related to a (translated) book, we should again ask whether and how the translation and the translator are present. Is the translation mentioned, considered and evaluated in reviews of the book? Is the translation or the translator mentioned in promotional messages? Is the translator interviewed about his/her translation of the book? Is the translator participating at reading events, or events when the author receives a literary prize?

## **Iperborea and the Italian Publication of Northern European Texts**

In the following section, I consider a concrete example of the publication of translations, namely the publication of translated literature from Northern Europe by the Italian publishing house Iperborea. Since we are concerned with a publishing house whose catalogue is entirely dedicated to the literature coming from one geographical region, the example is not representative of the majority of publications of foreign literature in Italy. It is nonetheless very appropriate for our analysis, since it provides clear evidence of tendencies that might be more difficult to identify among the so-called generalist publishers. Iperborea has an explicit policy, an extremely coherent strategy that makes it particularly well-suited for the examination of the different ‘translational’ voices of the publisher. What might be missing, or left out, is the kind of randomness mentioned in the introduction, although I consider as a variety of randomness the practice – extensively used at Iperborea – of connecting texts that originally are disconnected, thereby creating new “family resemblances,” in a stronger sense than what is common for the majority of publishers.<sup>17</sup>

The literature from the Nordic countries, generally little known by Italian readers and until recent years modestly represented by Italian publishing houses, makes this creation of family resemblances relatively easy. As Iperborea puts it on its web site, this near absence of literature from Northern Europe in Italy gave them great freedom when they started their activity, the freedom not only to choose, as we can read below, what texts to translate, but also the freedom to construct a literary identity:

Being the first publishing house in Italy to explore this area, we had the chance to do it with a great freedom of choice and within a high-quality production, which spans from the best contemporary authors to classics, from Nobel Prize winners, either unpublished or newly translated, to the most talented voices of the new literary trends and movements.<sup>18</sup>

Lawrence Venuti has addressed translation’s power to form “particular cultural identities and maintain [...] them with a relative degree of coherence and homogeneity,”<sup>19</sup> however, I will not be developing this dimension here, but simply refer to his work in this sense.

As a last determining reason for my choice of Iperborea for this study, let me add the fact that Iperborea works with the two languages – and literatures – I am personally familiar with, having been born and raised in Norway and living in Italy.

Iperborea was founded in 1987 “with the aim of spreading knowledge of Northern European literature in Italy.”<sup>20</sup> Already with the name Iperborea, the publisher announces its identity and programme, referring to “an unspecified region in the northern lands that lay beyond the north wind, ‘beyond the Boreas,’ Hyperborea, in Greek mythology.” The publisher is in a sense perpetrating that same mythology, creating expectations of something exotic.<sup>21</sup>

Iperborea’s twenty-five years of efforts to introduce mostly unknown authors from Northern Europe into Italy is a success story: the small ‘one-man-publisher’ has through these years gained notoriety, fame and several prizes, both in Italy and in the Nordic countries.

In the first years of the publisher’s activity, the literature translated came only from the Nordic Countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Iceland), but afterwards texts were published from other North European countries such as Netherlands and Estonia. Both classics and contemporary fiction are present in the catalogue, and in 1998 essays were also included. A crime series was launched in 2010, following the ‘wave’ of bestselling Scandinavian crime fiction.

The partiality of Iperborea’s choices is more than evident: the first and dominating criterion for the selection of books to translate and publish is simply their geographic and linguistic origin, an origin that is presented as distant, and therefore implicitly different and exotic. The choice of concentrating exclusively on a particular geographic region represents in itself a strong ideological position, creating indirectly a relation between the books on the publisher’s list, as if their common origin also represented a unity on levels (content, style, and genre) other than the geographical one. This ideology is furthermore present in many other aspects of Iperborea’s list, as I illustrate below, and even more in how the books are presented to the readers. The examples I consider here are all related to translations from Norwegian, but they are similar to those of the other countries represented.



There is a deliberate construction of unity and homogeneity among the books, sustained by the continuous and very explicit reference to the similar origin of the authors in the paratexts (both peritexts and epitexts). Iperborea's web site is extremely illustrative in this sense. On the home page<sup>22</sup> one finds an overall presentation of the publisher's consistent orientation towards the Northern European countries, thereafter one can go into separate pages for each country represented, which means that the authors and their books are categorized according to their national origin. This further element communicates the importance given, not only to the northern origin, but to each author's belonging to a specific national identity. The result is that there seems to be an almost automatic, both implicit and explicit quality ascription to the geographic origin, as if it in itself represented a guarantee of quality and, at the same time, that within the same geographic area the quality of one book is similar to that of another book. Cecilia Alvstad's study of Swedish publications of literature from Africa, Asia and Latin America, literatures that represent the cultural 'other,' contains interesting parallels. She notes, for instance, the publishers' emphasis on geography, through "the frequency of references to where the authors come from and where the books are set."<sup>23</sup>

A short parenthetical section on this strong relation created – by the publisher – among authors, their national origin, and their books, as if this relation were natural, is required. For several reasons the (partial) creation of this relation is rather problematic, since there is no reason to say that literature produced in one country is the expression of that same country. The idea that literature written in a certain language automatically can be seen as representative for a nation and a national literature is a construction. To use Benedict Anderson's term it is a construction of an *imagined community*,<sup>24</sup> based on the illusion of some essential origin. Today many scholars are questioning the relevance of the concept of national literature itself, but in publishing, and in translation, it seems to remain a rather strong practice, since it is apparently functional at several levels. Putting literature into categories like those of national literatures or geographic origins make books easier to interpret, translate, publish, and sell, as they can be connected to each other by external, tangible

features. From a commercial point of view, this can of course be seen as good promotion, with the indirect message: ‘if you like one book you like them all.’

This is exactly the strategy chosen by Iperborea: they construct national identities, creating connections among the books they publish, forming a kind of literary system that indirectly communicates they represent something common. Iperborea’s web site makes an explicit effort to create a community around the interest in, and sympathy for, writers and literatures coming from a specific Northern European linguistic, cultural, geographical, and national context. Furthermore, there is a strong attempt to create a community of readers resembling a social network: the readers are supposed to share an interest in Scandinavian literature and are therefore presumably interested in sharing related aspects of the culture of those countries, and even in studying their language. From the web site we learn that Iperborea even organizes language courses in Swedish and Danish, a rather particular extension of a publisher’s creation of a participating, active and faithful readership, or better, community. The intention of creating a community is confirmed by link to the “Iperborea Community” on Facebook<sup>25</sup> where one can find a selection of “the best from the Nordic Countries found on the web.”<sup>26</sup>

Another original example of this strategy is the wrapper for the translation of a crime novel by the Norwegian author, Thomas Enger (figure 2). On the left part of the wrapper, the part visible on the back cover of the book, the reader is invited to participate in a competition: by submitting a review of the book in question, the reader can win a trip to Oslo for two persons. This initiative is taken in collaboration with Visit Norway (Norway’s official travel guide), which means that there is also public participation in this promotion. On the right part of the same wrapper, as a promotion of the book, there is a quotation taken from the Danish journal *Politiken*, where we can read that the name of the author Thomas Enger has to be remembered, since he is “entering the group of the best crime writers from the North.” The existence of a “community” of crime writers from the north is confirmed by a Nordic newspaper, inviting the Italian readers to be part of the community of readership:



Figure 2: Wrapper of the translation of Thomas Enger’s *Skinndød.Morte apparente* [Apparent death]

### Series Strategies at Iperborea

The homogeneity of Iperborea’s publications starts from the format, giving them a distinct visual identity, different from all other formats published in Italy: the pages are particularly narrow and high (10 x 20 cm), the paper quality is excellent, with opaque textured jackets and inner pages of good quality. As one can see from the first five selected examples below (figure 3), the design of the cover/jacket reflects common features regarding the position and font of both author’s name and title, and the position of the publisher’s name:

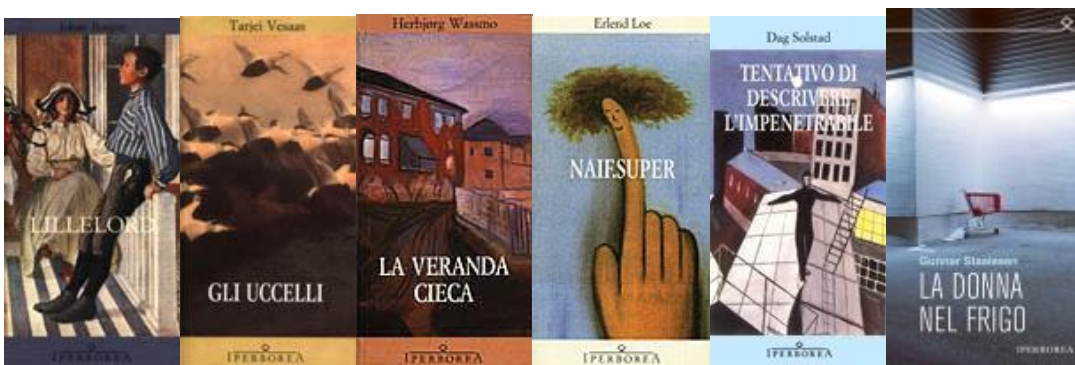


Figure 3: Covers of some of Iperborea’s translations of Norwegian literature

While the five first publications follow exactly the same graphic format, the last one on the right is different, both in size, format and design, underlining its belonging to a distinct series that is the crime series. Each book has a dominating colour and an illustration on the jacket, which is often taken from a painting by a Nordic artist. The image of the first on the left is for instance a painting

of the Swedish artist Carl Larsson, while the third cover is taken from a painting of the Norwegian Edward Munch. This characteristic of using Nordic artwork was more present in past years, when most of the books published were by modern classic authors. The fourth and fifth examples demonstrate a different style in the covers, reflecting the fact that they illustrate contemporary literature. The back covers follow all the same format. The upper half page contain “The Publisher’s Opinion,” a kind of blurb, while the lower half page is dedicated to a bio-bibliographic presentation of the author. The nationality of the author is always mentioned here. Again we have examples of a partial construction of homogeneity. Seen as a whole, the covers of Iperborea’s publications signal quality and even exclusivity, without ambitions of reaching a wide public or the random reader.

The exclusivity signalled by the books also depends on the fact that they are evidently results of an expensive production process. The reader who buys the book is conscious of getting an exclusive and prestigious product. Speaking about costs, it is worth mentioning here that almost all Iperborea’s books are published with some kind of financial support, often from the countries of the original version of the books. In the case of Norway, many of the translations of Iperborea’s books have been financed by NORLA [Norwegian Literature Abroad], the Norwegian Foundation for the Promotion of Literature Abroad.

The title page always gives information about the language from which the book is translated, with the standard wording “Traduzione dal norvegese di ...” [Translation from Norwegian by ...]. As we have anticipated earlier, this emphasis of the author’s national and geographic origin wherever possible, confirms the explicit choice by the publisher to emphasize national contexts, since many translations by other publishing Italian houses use the simpler wording “Traduzione di ...” [Translation by ...].

Every book has an afterword, often written by the translator. This afterword, which in the beginning years of the publisher’s history was a foreword, follows a similar pattern in all the publications: it is an informative introduction that presents the author and his/her work to readers who are not

expected to be specialists, but definitely interested in the culture of the Nordic countries, not only through a single book and through literature. The style is informational, presenting something that is little known and that therefore needs to be contextualised. The fact that these afterwords were forewords during the first years is in itself interesting. As far as I know there is no official explanation for this change, but the most likely reason is that although the publisher wants to 'guide' the readers in their interpretation of the text, this guiding is more optional with an afterword than with a foreword, simply by its being postponed as a supplementary invitation. Although the afterwords are frequently written by the translator of the book, they mostly discuss literature and critique, while specific questions, choices or difficulties regarding the translation of the text are seldom discussed. In line with this, the books have in most cases very few 'translator's notes' or 'translator's footnotes.' The translator's visibility is therefore relative.

In general we can say that Iperborea's books insist upon the foreignness of the books, providing their foreignness with additional value, simply for their belonging to foreign, different and exotic cultures, but paradoxically without thematizing the foreignness of the text in its original shape or including the translation process itself into this valorisation.

### **Localizing and Globalizing Strategies**

In a previous work where I analyzed different Italian translations of literary texts written by Norwegian authors,<sup>27</sup> I advanced the supposition that one can distinguish the translations along two main tendencies: while the translations published by Iperborea can be considered *localizing* in their insisting on geographical, national and cultural origin, other translations published by so-called generalist publishers could on the contrary be considered *globalizing*, in that they tend to present the translated books as representatives of a universal, global culture, rather than a local one.<sup>28</sup> While we could say that Iperborea tries to '(re)construct the other,' in its different, foreign, distant (geographical and cultural) identity, the generalist publishers could, in the opposite sense be considered to assimilate, by omitting, hiding, or at least not highlighting, the foreignness of the translated book. In that study I considered mainly the translations themselves, and the translation

strategies confirmed the difference between these two tendencies: generally I could distinguish between what I called localizing and globalizing strategies.

In that same work I advanced the hypothesis that the common geographical-national origin of the selected books included in Iperborea's catalogue also thematically represented a certain common category. The inclusion of only certain types of texts in terms of themes, and the exclusion of others, makes these countries' literatures appear even more homogeneous. This thematic homogeneity consists in privileging books where nature, and the human characters' strong binding to nature, is present, which means that the texts were thematically selected mainly for their representation of exotic features to Italian readers. As the scholar and translator of Nordic literature, Fulvio Ferrari puts it, "what immediately strikes the Italian reader is the strength of the bond to nature, to a nature that hasn't completely lost its autonomy from the human beings, as has the Italians' nature, a nature not yet subjugated, still able to win and enchant."<sup>29</sup>

While this homogeneity was rather easy to find in the first years, when the catalogue was quite short, and when it was important for the publisher to create its editorial identity, today it is more difficult, also due to the recent enlargement of the catalogue that includes, as said above, a series with crime novels.

### **Nordic Crime Fiction**

In the last few years, numerous crime novels written by Scandinavian authors have been translated into foreign languages, and this is the case for Italy too, completely transforming the literary landscape of translations from those countries, and consequently the publisher's translation-publication policy. Riding the bestselling wave that have followed the enormous success of Stieg Larsson's *The Millennium series*, Italian publishers have translated almost every crime novel published in Scandinavia in the last years. While the generalist publishers tended to blur the foreignness of the translations before this wave, both in the text itself and in the paratext, since their being Scandinavian did not give the texts any advantage of prestige or curiosity, today the situation is the opposite. Mainly for commercial reasons the generalist publishers tend to underscore the

Scandinavian origin of the texts, creating connections and expectations similar to those Iperborea have always been constructing: ‘If you like one Scandinavian crime novel, you will like them all.’ This strategy is clearly evident in the wrappers that very often decorate bestselling crime novels in Italy. The most noticeable example (figure 4) is the wrapper for one of the Norwegian crime author Jo Nesbø’s books:

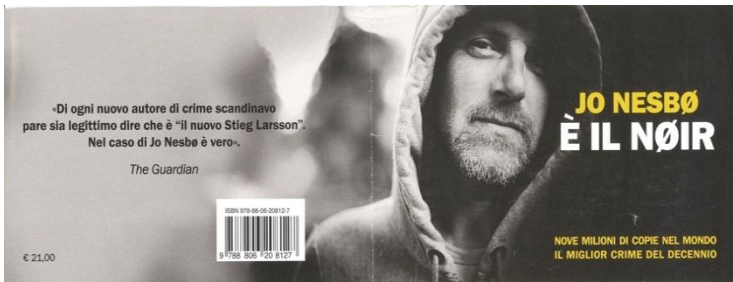


Figure 4: Wrapper to one of Jo Nesbø’s crime novels published by the Italian publisher Piemme

Playing with the particular letter of the Norwegian alphabet, the Ø, also present in the author’s last name, the adjective “noir” often used for describing crime novels in Italy, is spelled “nøir,” here creating a kind of exotic allusion to this foreign and distant literature. On the wrapper’s left part, the quotation taken from *The Guardian* and translated into Italian says: “For any new author of Scandinavian crime it seems legitimate to be named ‘the new Stieg Larsson.’ In the case of Jo Nesbø it’s true.”<sup>30</sup> With this sentence the wrapper creates almost a double connection to Stieg Larsson, saying at the same time that Nesbø belongs to the same Scandinavian tradition as Larsson, and that he is the true heir of Larsson. Scandinavian crime writing is presented as a category, alluding to a common tradition.

Another wrapper, also to present a book by Jo Nesbø (figure 5), creates an intertextual, ‘inter-authorial’ and cultural connection. Nesbø is introduced in what is presented as a Nordic tradition, as a continuer of the Norwegian author Anne Holt and of the Swedish author Camilla Läckberg:

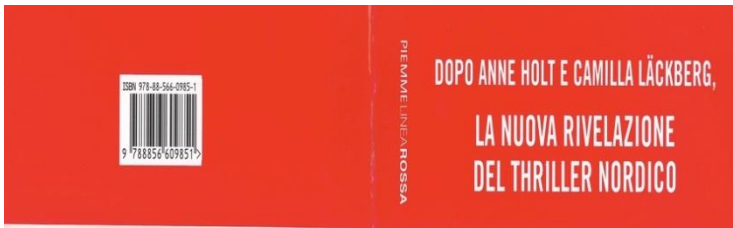


Figure 5: Wrapper to one of Jo Nesbø's crime novels published by the Italian publisher Piemme

The next two wrappers (figures 6 and 7) also make allusions to Scandinavia or the Nordic countries, confirming a homogeneous tradition with intertextual, or rather 'inter-authorial' allusions to other Scandinavian crime authors, creating a set of common expectations among the readers, similar to the communities in social networks.



Figure 6: Wrapper to one of Anne Holt's books translated and published by Einaudi

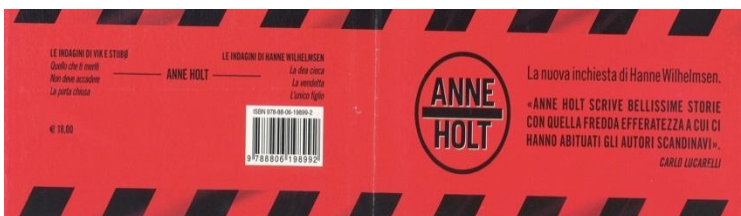


Figure 7: Wrapper to another of Anne Holt's books translated and published by Einaudi

The two wrappers present another Norwegian crime author, Anne Holt, who has gained incredible success in Italy. Her books are published by the prestigious, high-quality publisher Einaudi, signalling implicitly a high-quality brand to the authors that they publish. While the wrapper in figure 6 presents Holt as the queen of Scandinavian crime, the one in figure 7 comments on her books through a quotation by the Italian crime author Carlo Lucarelli. With this kind of 'inter-authorial' relation, one can conclude that Anne Holt has definitely entered the Italian landscape, being accepted by the country's home authors. In his comments, Lucarelli describes Holt's books as



being connecting to the “cold cruelty” typical of Scandinavian authors, again insisting on the homogeneity of all the crime literature coming from that geographic area.

Many epitextual elements may also explain this author’s fortune, elements that have to do with her personal and professional story. Anne Holt is a lawyer; she used to be Minister of Justice in a former Norwegian government. She is a declared lesbian; she is married and has a child. These biographical facts have given her additional notoriety, and made her particularly attractive for interviews and as guest at literature festivals. On Einaudi’s web site, Holt is presented with all the characteristics listed above, and is even promoted as one of Scandinavian’s most appreciated female authors by readers and critics of any time.<sup>31</sup> This is a rather exaggerated statement, especially when one compares it to the author’s reception in Norway, where she is both appreciated and bestselling, but also named as an example of the phenomenon of crime authors where literary quality and high sales numbers do not necessarily coincide.

Considering the almost literal invasion of Scandinavian crime fiction on the Italian publishers’ lists, where Scandinavian literature of any genre was almost absent before, some kind of effect on Iperborea is not a surprise, and rather unavoidable. The most evident effect is that Iperborea has started to publish crime fiction themselves, a genre that was completely excluded from their catalogue until 2010. And as we can see in figure 3 above, the physical image of these crime fiction publications is different from the rest of the publisher’s catalogue, and more similar to other publishers’ publications for equivalent series, especially regarding the format, that has been ‘normalised’ to the standards of crime fiction. The always present afterword has also been replaced by a shorter, one page bio-bibliographic presentation of the author. In format and paratext in general, these books tend to relate more to other Scandinavian crime novels rather than to the rest of Iperborea’s catalogue.

Comparing again the books published by Iperborea on one hand and by generalist publishers on the other, we can register a paradoxical situation over the last few years. While Iperborea has started to insist less on the origin of their publications, especially after the introduction of crime novels in the

catalogue, generalist publishing houses are strongly insisting on the common Nordic origin of their crime novels, alluding rather explicitly to a set of common thematic and stylistic features. The reasons for this paradox are probably various, but it seems to me that the generalist publishers profit by the trend that has shown to be successful in economic terms, and Iperborea is blurring its own specific editorial identity to be closer to the more commercial wave followed by the other publishers.

### **Politics of Translation**

Rather than offering a conclusion in the form of a summing up of the present article, I will finish with some political remarks on the translators' role in the translation-publishing process, and here I speak about the 'real' translators, those who translate the text itself. As I see it these 'translators' often have a marginalized position in the publishing process, competing with the other "translators," i.e., the publishers, who make the majority of decisions and are responsible for the paratexts and the final published book. In my opinion the "real" translators should be involved more directly in the whole publishing process, since, as emphasized in my introduction, all the steps in that process, all the elements of a published translation should be considered as a whole.

I am convinced that if translation was considered as an integral part of publishing (of translated texts), if the translators were considered as integral agents in the translation-publishing process, if their voice were present not only in the translations (where they still are preferably invisible and silent), but also in the paratexts, both the translations and the translators would gain something. The result would in fact be more visibility to both translations and translators, better retribution for the translator, and a general increased thematization of translation, that could result in a greatly enhanced awareness among publishers as well as readers about what translation is, what it does, and about the important role it fulfils in and among cultures. Readers need to be better informed if the book they are reading is a translation, and to know what kind of transformational process it has gone through.

Today the dominant idea among publishers, but also among many translators, is still that readers should be given the illusion of reading a text ‘as if it was an original.’ By advocating a politics of visibility of translations and translators I maintain, on the contrary, that the readers should always be reminded about the fact that the text they read is a translation. One of the ways to obtain this is by including the translators in the publishing process, and giving them power and visibility. Not all translators are interested in this, as many prefer not to participate actively in the material aspects of the translation of a book; this kind of resistance, as that of the publishers, should be overcome if one really wants translation to obtain more visibility and acknowledgement.

Not only the publishers need to give away some of their power, but the translators need to be willing to assume responsibility, declare their choices, reflect on their own work on a meta level, and take up the word and occupy more space in the paratexts, especially through introductions where they discuss, explain and comment on their translational choices. Only then can translators expect to be taken seriously and be respected actors in the translation-publishing process.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For lack of space I will limit my work to considering publications of printed translated literary (fiction) texts (books), not taking into account either other types of texts, or e-books or other forms of electronic publications. These other types of texts will without doubt contain many of the same characteristics as those regarding printed translations of fiction. Electronic/digital publications would need a treatment on their own, since material factors here play a completely different role.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), quoted in Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, “Introduction,” in *Translation, History & Culture*, eds. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1990), pp. 1-13.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> UrpoKovala, “Paratextual Mediation and Translation,” *Target*, vol. 8, no.1 (1996), p.117.

<sup>7</sup> Cecilia Alvstad, “The Strategic Moves of Paratext: World Literature through Swedish Eyes,” *Translation Studies*, vol. 5, no.1 (2012), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko, “Introduction” in *Translation and Power*, eds. Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), p. xviii.

<sup>9</sup> Gentzler and Tymoczko, “Introduction.”

- <sup>10</sup> David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery eds., *The Book History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- <sup>11</sup> Tore Rem, ed., *Bokhistorie* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003), p. 20.
- <sup>12</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Claud DuVerlie et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- <sup>13</sup> Richard Guthrie, *Publishing. Principles & Practice* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 25.
- <sup>14</sup> John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture. The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
- <sup>15</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, p. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 7.
- <sup>17</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Blackwell, 1953/2001).
- <sup>18</sup> <<http://www.iperborea.com/english/>>. Website accessed 2012-07-20.
- <sup>19</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 68.
- <sup>20</sup> All quotations on Iperborea are taken from the publishing house's website: <<http://www.iperborea.com/>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012.
- <sup>21</sup> <<http://www.iperborea.com/>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012.
- <sup>22</sup> <<http://www.iperborea.com/>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012.
- <sup>23</sup> Cecilia Alvstad, "The Strategic Moves of Paratext: World Literature through Swedish Eyes," p. 83.
- <sup>24</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1993).
- <sup>25</sup> <<http://www.facebook.com/IperboreaCommunity>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012.
- <sup>26</sup> "Una selezione del meglio dal Nord Europa raccattato in giro per il web." <<http://www.iperborea.com/>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012. Translation mine.
- <sup>27</sup> Siri Nergaard, *La costruzione di una cultura. La letteratura norvegese in traduzione italiana* (Rimini: Guaraldi, 2003).
- <sup>28</sup> Siri Nergaard, *La costruzione di una cultura*.
- <sup>29</sup> "Quello che subito, può colpire il lettore italiano è la forza del legame con la natura. Con una natura che, a differenza della nostra, non ha del tutto perso la sua autonomia dall'uomo, una natura non ancora soggiogata, ancora capace di vincere e incantare." Fulvio Ferrari, *Camminando nell'erica fiorita* (Milano: Lanfranchi, 1989), p. 7. Translation mine.
- <sup>30</sup> "Di ogni autore di crime scandinavo pare sia legittimo dire che è 'Il nuovo Stieg Larsson'. Nel caso di Jo Nesbø è vero." Translation mine.
- <sup>30</sup> <<http://www.einaudi.it/libri/autore/anne-holt/0007974>>. Website accessed 20 July 2012.

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