

F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Il grande Gatsby*. Trans. Franca Cavagnoli.

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The Great Gatsby is a notable classic of American literature written by novelist and short story writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896- 1940), first published in 1925. He is arguably one of the greatest writers of the 20th century and the success of *The Great Gatsby* proves to be nothing less than one of his greatest works. The novel is set in the 1920's, the period of the Jazz Age and the Roaring Twenties. Fitzgerald's novel portrays this era by encompassing themes such as social and moral values, parties, and jazz music, contrasting with darkness, and a sense of loneliness and hardship that followed the First World War. Italian translator, writer and professor Franca Cavagnoli, took on the challenge of translating this classic for the Italian speaking world; her very admirable translation was published in 2011 and won the "von Rezzori Prize" for translation that same year. Fitzgerald is greatly valued in the Italian speaking world, with the majority of his English-language works being translated, many by the prestigious publishing company Mondadori. Although Fitzgerald was not well known in Italy until the late 50s, he has developed a notable place in literary studies and is currently a key figure of American literature to the Italian speaking world. Italian writer Sergio Perosa has thoroughly analysed Fitzgerald's work and since then it has gained increased appreciation in Italy. Many critics have analysed different aspects of his work such as linguistic, structural, ideological and symbolic features. In *The Great*

Gatsby, social class is an important theme and it is intertwined with other key concepts such as character representation, geography and colour. Through the translation of literary devices, Cavagnoli maintains the poetic nature and flow of the original piece of work while adapting it to the Italian target audience.

The inclusion of characters from different social classes in Fitzgerald's novel reflects the context in which the novel is set; namely one in which a new divide between the rich and the poor was developing in America. Fitzgerald uses characterisation as a key method of portraying this gap, constructing each character in a specific way by adapting the writing style to match their social class. Cavagnoli remains faithful to this aspect of the original piece of work through her writing style and choice of translantants, which are the individual words the author selects in a translation in order for meaning to be carried across from one language to another. Firstly, it is important to highlight that Cavagnoli opts for a more source-oriented approach in selecting the translantants of the characters' names and other aspects such as places, street names etc. Instead of domesticating these terms in order to make them familiar to the Italian context and therefore losing some of the information from the source language, they remain the same as found in the source language, encouraging the reader to explore a culture other than one's own, in this case the American culture during the 1920's.

It is also important to note that the divide between speech and narration is a platform used by Fitzgerald and supported by Cavagnoli in order to further associate characters with particular social classes. The speech style of the characters provides a lot of information about their background and social status and this style has been effectively preserved in the translated version. For instance, the speech of Myrtle differs from that of Tom and even from Nick the narrator; Myrtle's speech includes markers that are stereotypically associated with that of a lower social class, such as "fellas" and "you'd of thought she had my appendicitis out."¹ These were translated as "sti tizi" and "sembrava che mi aveva tolto l'appendicite" (82) respectively. For these micro decisions, Cavagnoli has effectively leaned towards a more target-oriented approach. Focusing on the style of the characters' speech, the translated text mirrors the aim of the original text, possibly being to demonstrate the presence, uniqueness and interaction of people with different social and moral values in this era. Cavagnoli is to be commended for her ability to translate the speech style of the characters in a way that would be interpreted correctly by the target audience not only on a semantic level, but also in a way that would infer the same character representation as that which Fitzgerald suggests in his creation.

Linked to social class, but also somewhat standing on their own are two

important and recurring concepts that are present in *The Great Gatsby*, geography and colour. Geography is used to portray differences in social class; “East Egg” is the city of people who are born into being rich, contrasting with “West Egg” which is known as the city where people have to work for their money rather than relying on their inheritance. The significance of a social divide between the two cities is quite evident due to the way that the characters refer to them, however it is important not to forget about the readers. Fitzgerald uses geography to shape the context, characters and themes of the novel, however it can’t be assumed that the target audience, who in this case are from a different continent, are familiar with the locations and the connotations that come along with them. When aspects relating not only to key geographical information but also to American culture are mentioned, Cavagnoli provides a footnote for the reader. Although Italian literature tends to steer away from including too many footnotes, in this case it is an extremely effective strategy that provides the target reader with the opportunity to further their understanding of a particular element in the foreign culture, without taking anything away from the articulation and flow of Fitzgerald’s writing. His writing style is also one that includes many references to colours; yellow, blue, grey, green, white and red are the dominant shades of the novel. These colours assist in the shaping of characters, therefore if the translation of the colours aren’t given the required importance, the target audience could end up with a differing interpretation of particular characters. Although selecting translantants for colours appears to be rather straightforward, the non-linguistic aspects must also be considered. We can infer that the decision to translate the colour blue as “blu” (90) rather than “azzurro” corresponds to the representation of loneliness and melancholy found in the original (such as in the case of referring to the “blue gardens”² of Gatsby’s house). Although both of the possible terms refer to the colour blue and can generally be used interchangeably, “blu” is attributed to a slightly darker tone which carries with it darker emotions, while “azzurro” has a lighter, more positive connotation. It is evident that Cavagnoli didn’t select one of the two at random, but rather analysed the feelings and emotions that are attached to both, acknowledged the sentiment that Fitzgerald wanted to create and then reproduced that feeling in the target language.

Fitzgerald’s writing style is one of sophistication and poetic fluidity, including literary conventions such as metaphors and alliteration. This creates a difficult task for any translator as they must strive to maintain not only the core semantic value and significance of a particular word, sentence or phrase, but also preserve the beautiful arrangement and flow of words that provokes the reader to emotionally connect to the expressive text. In the translations of these literary conventions it is almost inevitable that a small

part of the text is almost “left behind” by the translator. Although Cavagnoli remains faithful to the poetic nature of the novel and has done so in an exceptional manner, there are a few instances in which the language itself has prevented her from creating the same fluidity in the target language that was produced originally by Fitzgerald. In these situations, it appears that Cavagnoli first focused on conveying the semantic aspects and then where possible maintained conventions such as alliteration and onomatopoeia. The final sentence of the *The Great Gatsby* is constructed in a way that includes a combination of techniques, meaning it could possibly be one of the more difficult parts to translate, however Cavagnoli succeeds in conveying the beauty of the language Fitzgerald uses. The original reads as “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past”³, and is translated as “Così navighiamo di bolina, barche contro la corrente, riportati senza posa nel passato” (224). The original text is filled with alliteration that is extremely difficult if not impossible to maintain in the target language while remaining faithful to the semantic aspects. However, Cavagnoli uses “navighiamo di bolina” rather than “bordeggiare” for this exact reason, to maintain whatever she could of the poetic sound, making “barche” immediately preceded by “bolina”. In other cases throughout *Il grande Gatsby*, Cavagnoli is more restricted as a result of the language itself, which simply cannot be manipulated to achieve both aspects to the same level as the original text, and therefore compromises must be made and a balance was successfully achieved. In the instance of “boom of a bass drum”⁴ being translated as “il rimbombo di una grancassa” (100), both alliteration and onomatopoeia is lost in the translation. This isn't due to the incapacities of Cavagnoli but rather the semantic nature of the Italian language.

Cavagnoli's translation contributes a valuable understanding of Fitzgerald to the Italian study of American literature. The world of *Gatsby* is brought to an Italian audience in such a way that the target readers can appreciate the writing style, themes and context presented to them. Social class, characterisation, colours, geography and literary conventions were some of the many important aspects that were needed to be considered in this process of translation. With no extreme or unnecessary changes, Cavagnoli is to be commended for her translation as it gracefully maintains and conveys most of which Fitzgerald presents in his exceptional piece of work.

¹ Cavagnoli, Franca, "Vaghezza e chiarezza: tradurre Il grande Gatsby," *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*. 1 (2014): 163-175

² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 26.

³ Fitzgerald, 115.

⁴ Fitzgerald, 33.