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Translating Evelyn Conlon

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Ira Torresi

## Translating Evelyn Conlon

**Abstract** This chapter explores the challenges encountered by the translator of Evelyn Conlon's fiction. As will be argued, the writer's gendered perspective, unobtrusive, and yet powerfully pervasive, cannot be ignored by the translator. In this respect, Conlon's female characters fictionally embody what Donna Haraway (1988) has called "situated practices." Drawing on all this, the chapter will focus on a discussion of the Italian translations (by the author of the chapter herself) of "Dear You," first published in English and Italian in the literary journal *Tratti* (2013) and of "Two Gallants," published in *Dubliners 100* (2014).

As a translation scholar, it is my usual professional duty to produce academic papers that may potentially contribute to the advancement of translation studies. Papers that are not based on anecdotal data, and that approach the issue being analysed from the broadest possible perspective, eschewing narrow self-centred perspectives. In this case, however, for the sake of intellectual honesty I must admit from the very start that when I look at my work as Evelyn Conlon's Italian translator, it is impossible to disentangle objective analysis from subjective experience. I have no other choice, then, than to invoke the notion of translation as an inherently subjective, "situated practice"<sup>1</sup> and claim my right to being a "visible" translator (Venuti 1995) as an "intruder" or mediator (Hatim and Mason 22) between Conlon and her Italian readers as I explain the history of my acquaintance with Evelyn Conlon and her work.

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<sup>1</sup> With the term "situated practice" I intend to establish a connection between the practice of translation and Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges." I argue that like all forms of knowledge, the craft of translation, too, is never objective, but steeped in the translator's (and reader's) embodied subjectivity.

## 1. Dear You

Translators, the Joycean scholar Fritz Senn has written, are the first readers of a text. In my case with Conlon's "Dear You," this was literally the case. In September 2012, Professor Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli (1940– 2016) asked me if I would translate a short story about Violet Gibson, the Irishwoman who shot Mussolini, by Irish writer Evelyn Conlon. Conlon was at the time in Rome, where the attempt took place, checking her facts and finishing the story. She pertinently wished for it to be first published in Italy, the country to which it would certainly be of great relevance. Within one hour or so of hearing from Conlon, Professor Bollettieri Bosinelli had contacted a publisher, Faenza-based Moby Dick, secured a translator – myself – and asked Conlon to send the still unfinished story so that I could start thinking about it. "Dear You" would come out in a bilingual edition, and the publisher planned it to be included in the next issue of his journal *Tratti* – which meant that the translation needed to be done swiftly.

I have always had a penchant for the Second World War history, and since I had never heard about an Irishwoman's attempt on Mussolini's life (I checked on all history schoolbooks I could lay hands on: no mention of her whatsoever), I could not wait to read the story. When Conlon eventually did send me the draft, I gulped it down like water. Two things happened simultaneously: I blessed the moment that I said yes to Professor Bollettieri Bosinelli, or otherwise I would have never laid hands on it (not so early, at least); and regretted that very same moment, because it was clear that translating it would prove to be quite a challenge. Of one thing I was certain: it would not, *could* not be as quick as the publisher, and Conlon herself, wished for. I tried as best as I could, but Conlon was right – Violet Gibson's figure deserved to be restored to Italy (where no one had ever heard of her, and where she still is largely unknown to the broader public). Thus, from the beginning I was conscious that the voice that Conlon had given her should be treated with appropriate consideration, and this would necessarily require much pondering.

The problem was not so much in individual details, some of which I will be nonetheless discussing in the following, but, rather, in their cumulative effect of creating a slanted perspective using apparently neutral language.

It was like looking at the picture of a slope captured at an equally sloping angle, so that it appears as a flatland, and the illusion can only be revealed by the inclination of the figures walking on it, who at first look oddly out of place before one understands that “strangeness” and “displacement” are inevitably in the eye of the beholder.

As Martina Evans wrote in her review of *Telling, Selected Stories by Evelyn Conlon* (2016), in a sentence that has rightly been chosen as the front cover endorsement for her more recent *Moving about the Place* (2021), where “Dear You” has been republished: “She comes from an odd angle that suddenly seems like the only angle worthwhile.” Would I be able to slant the picture at the same “odd angle”? Would that angle seem equally worthwhile, for all its oddity, to Italian readers?

The first obstacle I encountered was the very title of the short story, “Dear You” – an address to an unknown reader of Violet Gibson’s message in a bottle, whose gender remains indeterminate. The Italian grammar does not allow for the same indeterminacy and a dear person must be, at the time of my translation as well as at Violet Gibson’s time, either male “*caro*” or female “*cara*.” Schwas for non-determined or non-binary gender identities, as in *carə*, (Gheno 184–185) were not an option at either time. Similarly, the “generic masculine” (*caro* for both genders) was not a possibility, as it is usually avoided in direct addresses; it is also reminiscent of the same patriarchal norms that Conlon’s Violet Gibson explicitly opposes.

At the same time, it was important to foreshadow from the very start that Violet Gibson did not know who would be receiving her letter, so the best option appeared to be the use of both the male and female forms. I was initially drawn to making the mutually exclusive alternative explicit, as in *Caro o cara*. But that choice appeared rather unmarked, neutral, devoid of that subtly odd angle of *Dear You*. Why, one might wonder, did Conlon not choose a more standard *Dear Reader*? “*Caro, Cara*” it was, then, with a voluntarily baffling contrast between the letter opening, and the title to the story, that seems to be addressing two separate people, one male and the other female in the singular. That grammatical clash does reveal the mystery – but not immediately. Equally non-standard is the use of a capital letter after the comma, for *Cara*. Capitalizing references to the reader, as Conlon herself did in “Dear You,” suggests a degree of formality that clashes, once again voluntarily, with the informal use of the singular *tu*

(with lower case initial) for *you*. Using the formal *lei* would surely be more expected of a well-educated woman born in the 1870s communicating with an unknown reader. Even more historically accurate would be the use of *voi* in lieu of *lei*, now obsolete or regional, but standard in the early twentieth century. Since the *voi* form was precisely imposed over the “barbaric” *lei* by fascist linguists and educators (Treccani), using such address would hardly fit with the character of Violet Gibson.<sup>2</sup>

Which brings me to another difficulty in rendering the slanted perspective of the story. Violet Gibson is, to quote Rebecca Pelan’s chapter in this volume, clearly one of “Evelyn Conlon’s women behaving badly.” She does not comply with the feminine norms of her time and place:

He [my father] did not cut me out [of his will] to the same extent because he would have thought that my difference could not be so dangerous, me being female. Well there ... But you may be having difficulty with the idea of a woman doing it. Mussolini certainly did, they say he exclaimed to himself, What, a Woman! He didn't like that ... They told me that in the end he did not want a woman standing trial for shooting him. News that a woman had taken aim and almost succeeded could take on a life of its own and lead to his ridicule. So he had to find a solution. And he and my family and England did. (50, 58, 62)<sup>3</sup>

Violet Gibson “behaves badly” because unlike most women of her time, she has an ideological stance that she is ready to turn into action, and quite belligerently, too. We learn she has “bickerings” with her family about her conversion to Catholicism (48), and her preparation of the attempt on Mussolini’s life is described at length and in detail in “Dear You.” Even

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<sup>2</sup> At the time when fascism came into power, the respect forms *lei* and *voi* were both possible. On the grounds that *lei* was “imported” from the Spanish (while somehow ignoring the similarity between *voi* and the French *vous*), however, fascist grammarians ruled out the *lei* form in favour of the more “authentically” Italian *voi*. It was the same time when the first names of the characters in foreign novels were translated into their closest Italian equivalents; and Italian-sounding words had to be invented from scratch to replace all foreign terms – for instance, *tramezzino* instead of *sandwich* (both possible today).

<sup>3</sup> Here and in the following, I will be referring to the page numbers of the bilingual first edition of “Dear You,” in *Tratti*. After the journal was shut down, the story was republished in the online journal *Accenti*; the English original is also part of Evelyn Conlon’s 2021 collection, *Moving about the Place*.

when she is confined to an asylum, she never stops writing letters to the press, in order to publicly explain her motives (although those letters are left unsent by the hospital authorities). This information is laid out explicitly in the story, but much more lays in her look on things, such as her tacit condemnation of what she saw as inequality and injustice despite its being regarded as normal and appropriate for her time and social status. This deviation from the social norm sometimes goes hand in hand with deviations from the grammatical norm, as when Conlon renders Violet Gibson's recollection of what happened to her and her siblings after their father became Lord Chancellor of Ireland: "I think the boys in the house got more important then and *the girls were expected to do even less than we had done before*, but with a lot of dressing up" (46, my emphasis).

Here Violet Gibson seems to be looking back onto her own past simultaneously from outside, using a third person plural – "*the girls were expected to do*" – and from the inside, as suggested by the first person plural – "*even less than we had done.*" The grammatical inconsistency is recreated in Italian, too, purposefully introducing a finite verb in the third person plural – "*che facessero*" – that is possible in the following structure, but would not, otherwise, be necessary – "Penso che allora i bambini di casa diventarono più importanti e dalle bambine ci si aspettava *che facessero ancora meno di quanto avessimo fatto prima*, però vestite più eleganti" (47, my emphasis). Another deviation from the norm, this time in style, is the rapid shift from long, articulate sentences (typical of written prose) to shorter sentences, often without a verb or with other parts of the sentence going implicit, as if Violet Gibson were thinking aloud on the written page. This can be found at several points in the story when she seems to veer from recounting facts to voicing her strongest emotions, such as anger or a feeling of betrayal. The following paragraph illustrates how she uses cold humour to distance herself from the gratuitous horror of the gynaecological visit upon incarceration:

One of the jailers got me Professor Gianelli's report. She smuggled it in to me. I have always been able to get on well with staff, yes it was best to think of my jailers as that. *Still is*. The fine Professor, a snake of a man, wrote to the Prosecutor that he had proceeded to undertake the examination, that the prisoner had submitted to it without protest. That means he noticed that I had kept my eyes open. He went on to say that the hymen was not intact, he said that it permitted with ease the introduction of two exploratory fingers, *that's his two fingers*. He went on to talk about squeezing my

urethra. *He would*. The hymen is not intact. *Indeed*. I could have told him that. And made it sound a good and joyful thing. (60, my emphasis)

In the Italian translation, omission is not always materially possible, as in the case of the first and third emphasized incomplete sentences, “[It] Still is” and “He would [do it].” In Italian, the pronoun *lo* (it) had to be added in both cases, or the sentences would be incomprehensible. “That’s his two fingers,” a separate clause at the end of a sentence, was turned into a parenthetical one, and *sue* was italicized in the translated text in order to retrieve some of the marked effect and emphasis of the original. The last example in the excerpt, the single word, “Indeed,” was easier to render as “*Ma dai*,” which conveys the same bitter irony of the original, although using two words and slightly lowering the register:

Una delle carceriere mi fece avere il referto del Professor Giannelli. Me lo diede sottobanco. Ho sempre avuto la capacità di andare d’accordo con il personale, sì era meglio pensare ai miei carcerieri in questi termini. *Lo è ancora*. Questo buon Professore, una serpe, scriveva al Procuratore che aveva proceduto a effettuare l’esame, che la prigioniera vi si era sottoposta senza protestare. Cioè aveva notato che avevo tenuto gli occhi aperti. Proseguiva dicendo che l’imene non era intatto, diceva che aveva permesso senza difficoltà l’introduzione di due dita (*le sue due dita*) ai fini dell’ispezione. Andava avanti a parlare della spremitura uretrale. *L’ha fatto*. L’imene non è intatto. *Ma dai*. Gliel’avrei potuto dire anche io. E farlo suonare come una cosa buona e gioiosa. (61, my emphasis)

Another challenge, this time a more evident one, is the juxtaposition of neutral or even positively connoted terms and negative ones with reference to the same person or event, which reveals the previous as ironical or euphemistic. In the previous example, we find “staff ” along with “jailers,” a euphemism that Violet resorts to in order to endure her imprisonment a little better; and the “fine Professor” (ironical) is “a snake of a man.” Although such clashing connotations are not difficult to render in Italian – “*carcerieri*” / “*personale*”; “*buon Professore*” / “*una serpe*” – they do require some close reading to be spotted, as in some cases they are part of a longer sentence that starts neutrally and then takes a sharp turn towards spite or other hard feelings:



I will begin near the beginning, although it is hard to know what bits of our beginning make us take action, or not, as is the case with most people, what bits make us be part of the wider world looking out, often the same things that make a sibling gather into themselves and *step back into the comfort of their own pettiness*. (44, my emphasis)

Inizierò quasi dall'inizio, anche se è difficile sapere quali pezzi del nostro inizio ci fanno agire, oppure no, come succede alla maggior parte della gente, quali pezzi ci rendono parte del più vasto mondo là fuori, spesso le stesse cose che fanno sì che uno del tuo stesso sangue si chiuda in sé e *si ritiri nella comodità della propria piccineria*. (45, my emphasis)

In the following extract, fond childhood memories and one of the rare moments of tranquillity of the Violet-in-the-past, who has just been released from the Mantellate jail in Rome, give way to the bitter betrayal that the present-time Violet feels in hindsight, looking back to her trip to England after her sister Constance has fetched her to lock her up at the Northampton asylum:

Constance had jumped a strange frightened jolt and I had said, oh come Constance, no need to be ansty, it was a word we had used when children and I thought it might have helped her, but it was the beginning of her getting more and more nervous while I got calmer and calmer, happy to watch the towns come and shine and fade sedately. *If only I had known*. If I had known that *my life had been signed away* but that I was a free woman while whizzing through France I could have escaped. (64, my emphasis)

Constance aveva avuto uno strano sussulto di paura e avevo detto: dai Constance, non farti prendere dall'anza, era una parola che usavamo da bambine e pensai che l'avrebbe sollevata, ma da lì in poi si fece sempre più nervosa mentre io mi facevo sempre più calma, felice di guardare le città che si avvicinavano scintillavano e poi svanivano nella sonnolenza della foschia. *Se solo avessi saputo*. Se avessi saputo che *la mia vita era già stata data via con una firma*, ma che ero ancora una donna libera mentre sfrecciavamo per la Francia, sarei potuta scappare. (65, my emphasis)

I did not know it then, but my acquaintance with Conlon's righteously badly behaving women was not over.

## 2. Two Gallants

In 2014, fellow Joycean scholar and translator Enrico Terrinoni, who translated James Joyce's *Ulysses* for Newton Compton (2021) and *Finnegans Wake* for Mondadori (2017 and 2019), alerted me to *Dubliners 100*, published by Tramp Press. The collection, described on the front cover as "fifteen new stories inspired by the original," was edited by Thomas Morris who challenged fifteen Irish writers to respond to Joyce's *Dubliners* on the occasion of the centenary of the work. In his introduction, Morris describes the process less as rewriting and more like "covering" a song – "to tell the story again but in your voice" (ix) – giving each writer the freedom to stay as close or wander as far from the language, atmosphere and incident of the original as they wished. The Italian translation was under production by the publisher Minimum Fax, being edited by Mirko Zilahi De Gyurgyokai. Enrico was working on some of the translations: would I like to translate a story by Evelyn Conlon?

This is how I, again, found myself at the odd angle, but the only one worthwhile, again, fighting to achieve the same slanting, sloping perspective on the Italian page that I could detect on the Irish side. In "Two Gallants," however, the rendering of the slanting slope was made more complicated by the intertwining of two different stories into one, presented from two different perspectives each. On the one hand there is the retelling of Joyce's original "Two Gallants," which is fictionally turned into a real story told both through Lenihan and Corley's angle, as in Joyce's original, and in the first person by the servant girl tricked by Corley, in a letter (again). On the other, there is the story of Ruth, the servant's granddaughter, who after being handed the letter by a conscientious librarian, discloses it at a Joyce Symposium in the present moment. Telling the maid's side of the story and revealing that she had, after all, found Corley out is not the only way Ruth carries out her "feminist revenge" (Curyllo-Klag 52). Ruth also averts an established scholar's plot to steal her notes and claim them as his own work, as he habitually does with lesser-known, less powerful scholars; in a reminiscence of Violet Gibson, only a "mad woman" had had the nerve to reveal the truth in public, and had been ignored. Ruth replaces her notes with a sort of self-accusation which the established scholar reads out faithfully,

unable to understand what has happened. Thus another Corley, at another time, gets what he deserves, as her grandmother wished for in her letter:

... you know you have to get over boys like that so I thought I would get them some day, maybe not yet, but some day. I would bide my time like an owl waiting for the night. And when theirs came I would watch them eating their words as if they were sand, trying to spit them and I would not help them, maybe pass them a bit of water, but not much. (68)<sup>4</sup>

If Joyce had already denounced the gallants' treachery eloquently, in her cunning re-appropriation of the story Conlon adds her own slant to it. First, in one of the italicized inserts that weave the two men's story into Ruth's, they try to threaten Joyce himself so as to be depicted less judgementally: "Easy Mr Joyce, that was not fair ... Oh well, whatever you think. *We'll get our own backs*, we'll get the backroom boys to refuse to print – *after all* Corley talks to the policemen" (62, my emphasis).

The threatening tone required a free translation here, in particular about "get[ting] our own backs," in the sense of "taking measures to protect ourselves," which is translated as "*occhio per occhio*," that is, "what comes round goes round," and the understated "after all," rendered as "*stai attento*," meaning "careful there": "Su, signor Joyce, non essere ingiusto ... Ah be', fa' un po' quel che ti pare. *Occhio per occhio* allora, diremo a chi tira i fili di non andare in stampa, *stai attento* che Corley parla con i poliziotti" (73–74, my emphasis). Second, Conlon strips Corley of his presumptuous confidence:

Corley said I always let her wait a bit, *sweating* that this might be just the time she would decide to move forward, decide that the *petting* of his ego and *mediocre* kissing was just not worth the humiliation of having to stand on a street corner, pretending to be excited by the thoughts of him. Funny that men dressed like him were never good at kissing. *Him and his oily head*. (64, my emphasis)

The belittling effect is achieved by using explicit terms such as "sweating" and "petting of his ego" where the translation "*trastullargli l'ego*" conveys

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<sup>4</sup> Here and in the following pages, I will be referring to the page numbers of the original Tramp Press edition. "Two Gallants" has also been republished in Evelyn Conlon's 2021 collection, *Moving about the Place*.

the sexual innuendo suggested by “mediocre” and “oily.” This passage was rendered in Italian through one of the devices we have already encountered in “Dear You” – a short nonverbal sentence placed at the end of a more articulated paragraph:

Corley disse la faccio sempre aspettare un po', *sudando freddo* che quella potesse essere proprio la volta che lei decidesse di andare avanti, che *trastullargli* l'ego e qualche *mediocre* bacio non valessero l'umiliazione di doversene stare a un angolo di strada, fingendo di essere tutta un fremito al solo pensiero di lui. Curioso come gli uomini che si vestivano come lui non fossero mai bravi baciatori. *Lui e la sua testa unta.* (76, my emphasis)

In Conlon's “Two Gallants,” the most diminishing treatment, however, is reserved to the treacherous Joycean scholar, Toby Doyle, who is so well known that he goes under his initials TD, but whose fame is based on his stealing from others' ideas. TD actually pays another scholar, Lachey, to materially steal papers from promising but still obscure Joyceans, which TD will weave into his own narrative to present as his own ideas. In the following extract, TD is planning to do the same with Ruth, as a corollary of a dark, rapacious attraction towards her:

He knew how to read Joyce, not everyone did. There were some people who thought that you could decipher it in different ways, he didn't agree, he thought you had to be a particular kind of man to understand *Finnegans Wake*. *Woman? Ah no, didn't think so. But the funny thing was sometimes, just sometimes ...* For instance, he'd like to get close to that Ruth, converse with her, debate some things with her, alright copy some of her notes, if the opportunity presented itself. (66, my emphasis)

Once again, following the same pattern found in “Dear You,” short, often elliptical, sentences mark the veering of TD's thoughts from big-headed self-complacency to even more irrational and negatively connoted delusions, that here take on a sexist and predatory tinge very similar to the one we find in Joyce's original gallants. In Italian, the effect was preserved with the exception of the omission of the subject in “didn't think so.” Here the implicit third-person subject “he,” standing for TD, is turned into the first person singular “*credo*” (I think), as if TD were thinking to himself, purposefully creating a clash with the third person used in the rest of the excerpt. This mix of external and internal perspective was

not in the original, but it is not new to Evelyn Conlon's prose – we have already seen it in the first bilingual example from “Dear You” above (the girls / we):

Sapeva come leggere Joyce, non era da tutti. C'era chi pensava che si potesse decifrarlo in modi diversi, lui non era d'accordo, pensava che bisognasse essere un tipo d'uomo particolare per capire *Finnegans Wake*. Donna? Ah no, non credo proprio. Ma la cosa strana era che certe volte, ma solo certe volte ... Per esempio, gli sarebbe piaciuto avvicinare quella Ruth, conversare con lei, discutere con lei di certe cose, magari sì, anche copiare alcuni dei suoi appunti, se si presentava l'occasione. (79, my emphasis)

TD's and Lachey's world is for winners, and women are not even competitors. They are not even seen as rational adults: “‘I don't like stealing from a *girl*,’ Lachey said. ‘If you're worried about being found out, remember that if you stole from a *man* chances are someone might have heard it before, but a *girl*, it's unlikely’” (66, my emphasis). The Italian rendition does not follow entirely the original in that it renders “girl” as baby-talk “*femmina*,” and “man” (intentionally not “boy” in the original) in the baby-talk equivalent, “*maschio*.” Here I forced the interpretation of Lackey and TD's sexist view as childish (*maschi* / boys vs *femmine* / girls), beyond what was suggested in the original: “‘Non mi piace rubare alle *femmine*,’ disse Lachey. ‘Se ti preoccupi di essere scoperto, ricorda che se rubi a un *maschio* c'è la possibilità che qualcuno ne abbia già sentito parlare, ma con una *femmina* è improbabile’”. (79, my emphasis)

In her “Two Gallants,” however, Conlon sets things right not only by offering retribution for the two boyos' and the plagiary's treachery, both in the plot and through the language she uses. Conlon also points at the possibility of a world in general, and academia in particular, where the practice of asserting one's “authoritativeness” by overpowering weaker ones, allegedly including women, is opposed by women's awareness and belligerent strength:

[Ruth] knew that, she'd had to *fight* for every inch of intelligent space as those around her did their *very best* to dirty her brain with *small talk* and *small views of herself*. She'd looked at conversations that she was being forced into and she'd seen them metamorphose into mouths that were chewing and *spitting out her dreams*. (60, my emphasis)

The Italian rendition of this excerpt adds emphasis and resorts to idiomatic expressions for “fight” – “*lottare con le unghie e con i denti*” and for “very best” – “*tutto, ma proprio di tutto.*” Additionally, the word order is modified so that “*risputavano*” (“spitting them out”) becomes the last word. Thus, the paragraph ends on an entirely different note than the original conveys with the word “dreams.” These interventions are aimed at making up for the loss of the rhetorical effect of the repetition of “small” in “small talk and small views of herself,” a parallelism that was impossible due to the idiomatic nature of “small talk.” The expression was therefore rendered as “*chiacchiere inutili e sguardi umilianti*” (“pointless chit-chat and humiliating looks”), substituting the abstract “views of herself” with their concrete manifestation, “*sguardi*” (“looks [upon her]”):

[Ruth] aveva dovuto *difendere con le unghie e con i denti* ogni centimetro di spazio intelligente mentre tutti o quasi tutti intorno a lei facevano di tutto, *ma proprio di tutto*, per inquinare il cervello con *chiacchiere inutili e sguardi umilianti*. Aveva visto certe conversazioni in cui era stata trascinata, e le aveva viste trasformarsi in bocche che masticavano i suoi sogni e li *risputavano*. (71, my emphasis)

Another woman academic seems to use the strength of her independent thought to fight for other women, they being in the position where the Gotha of the academic world would want to put all women, as one may read between the lines of the following quotation:

“I see you’re going to talk about the Two Gallants. *Bit of a leap for you,*” a tall, rangy man said to a corpulent one. They were surrounded by men in various shades of in-between.

“I’m going to that,” the suddenly animated Italian woman said in an olive voice ...

“What,” the tall man bellowed, *looking down at Rosa Maria*, “I would have thought you’d hate them.”

“Why?” Rosa Maria asked, *looking up at him with one eyebrow higher than the other*. Her hair was black, her face illumined with *enjoyment*.

“Well ...” *There was a trap here somewhere but he couldn’t find it.*

“Ah, but I like the way they were imagined. I could hate them but I don’t,” she said, *her eyes crinkling at the corners, letting him off, saving his fall.*

“*I see*,” Toby said, from the left hand of the circle, *not seeing at all*. (61–62, my emphasis)

The Italian rendition focuses on the elements italicized above, in order to offer the same picture of power relations and their half-jocular subversion by Rosa Maria, the only female voice out of an all-male chorus:

“Ho visto che parlerai dei due galanti. *È un bel salto per te*,” disse un uomo alto e slanciato a uno piuttosto corpulento. Erano attornati da uomini di varie gradazioni intermedie.

“Allora vengo a sentirlo,” disse la voce olivastria dell’italiana, improvvisamente animata ...

“Come,” tuonò lo spilungone guardando Rosa Maria *dall’alto*, “non avrei mai detto che ti potessero piacere.”

“E perché?” chiese Rosa Maria ricambiando lo sguardo *dal basso, un sopracciglio più sollevato dell’altro*. Aveva capelli neri e un viso reso radioso dal *divertimento*.

“Be’ ...” *Qui da qualche parte c’era una trappola, ma lui non riuscì a trovarla*.

“Ah, invece mi piace il modo in cui sono stati immaginati. Potrebbero non piacermi, ma mi piacciono,” replicò lei, *gli occhi arricciati agli angoli, togliendolo d’impaccio, salvandolo dalla caduta*.

“*Capisco*,” fece Toby dalla sinistra del circolo, *senza aver capito niente*. (72 and 74, my emphasis)

Ruth and Rosa Maria appear to be on the same page here, and their side unequivocally wins: Rosa Maria’s “gurgling ... laughter” (69) is the first reaction to the glorious revelation about the maid knowing all about Corley’s plans, and the two go out to the pub together at the end of the symposium day to “sip the light of today, while in the far corner of a different place Toby would try to drink some darkness from the night” (70). Their sorority is echoed by Ruth’s reading of her grandmother’s letter and by her acknowledging to herself the women who “must have helped them [the inventors of the contraceptive pill], tried out their ideas even, made sure that Ruth now had the means not to get caught [pregnant]” (64). Ruth also notices how the woman helping a male pianist rehearsing an aria by Puccini turns the page in perfect time, “she too must have known the notes” (63) and the story mentions twice the woman who pushes her

trolley around the clusters of scholars after coffee breaks, gathering cups, a way to subvert the unspoken rule that “who cared about the girl in the basement” (64) or that the servant (pretty much like the translator, or the interpreter) is a “non-person” who goes unnoticed in social situations (Goffman 95).

The most recurring trait in “Dear You” and “Two Gallants” (as well as in much of Evelyn Conlon’s prose) is this noticing of what women do, even when they remain in the shadows. I hope I have rendered justice to Conlon’s endeavour of conveying the voices of a fictional sorority of women determined to right the wrongs of a world of male-dominated discourse. As a feminist translator, who believes that “we should all be feminists” (Ngozi Adichie 2014), I could not help but collude with Conlon in subverting the sentences that imposed silence on Violet Gibson and the servant girl tricked by Joyce’s Corley: “[T]he feminist translator, following the lead of the feminist writers she translates, has given herself permission to make her work visible, discuss the creative process she is engaged in, collude with ... the writers she translates” (Von Flotow 74).

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