“L'Infinito” - Giacomo Leopardi's

"L'infinito" is a poem written by Giacomo Leopardi probably in the autumn of 1819. The poem, with its simple composition, has elements of the philosophical and classical worlds, as we can see in the selection of the word “ermo”, from ancient Greek rather than using a more conventional 'solitario' to make us feel the desolateness of this hill. This personification of natural environment is the most important theme of the poem and is typical of another movement: romanticism. There is also a sense of mortality throughout the poem, created by the dying of seasons and drowning of thoughts, which reminds to Leopardi's belief that he would not live long (which really happened as he died aged only 38).

It is written in blank (hendecasyllabic) verse: use of the interplay between enjambment (line run on) and diaeresis. Recently has been made, in England and Canada, the English translation of the Zibaldone of G. Leopardi. This shows that even today the love for the study of classics is still current. In USA, Canada and England, latin is a distinctive note that elevates the level of schools.

The “Infinito” has already been translated, and has in common with Hamlet's soliloquy, the existential doubt on how to accept the unhappiness in life. This is the heroic response of Leopardi, which opposes the rational conviction that the man was born to suffer, to the illusions as a “sweet abandonment to nothing”, created in this famous text.

After the observation of a hedge that excludes him the gaze, the poet manages, to begin an immaginary journey and manages to create a momentary infinity in which there is neither space nor time and the titan Leopardi abandons himself to that nothing that causes him "sinking in this sea is sweet to me".

There are numerous terms called "peregrini" which intensify the emotions expressed.

The slow Rythm is supported by numerous enjembemnt.

In the final part there is an historic reference to his epoque “the present”, compared with the past “the dead seasons”; the exhilaration of the acquired immersion in the Infinite is expressed in these verses (“so in this immensity... thoughts”).

Sometimes appears the term "thoughts" wich shows that the poetry of Leopardi can be called even “Poetry of thought”, because his texts are travel both of imagination and thoughts that lead to vague and undefined.

While reading the English version we found that it’s a literary translation and that some words, that in Italian give some kind of emotions and provoke particular feelings, in English don’t have the same effect.

Always dear to me was this isolated hill and this hedge, which, from so many parts of the far horizon, the sight excludes. But sitting and gazing unlimited spaces beyond it, and ultraterrestrial silences, and the deepest quiet, In my thoughts, I fancy; where almost my heart scares. And as the wind I hear rustling through these trees, I keep comparing that infinite silence, to this voice: and I feel the eternal,
and the dead seasons, and the present,
and living one, and the sound of her. So in this
immensity my own thoughts drown:
and is sweet to me sinking in this sea.

(The underlined areas are the ones that I changed)

As the translation is too much literary, after a discussion in class I tried to rearrange it, to give the the poem the feelings and emotions that we lost with the translation.

- “solitary”, didn’t work as the Greek “ermo” so I choose the word “isolated” which gives to the poem the idea of the loneliness that the poet feels.
- For the word “endless” is the same: words like “unlimited” or “boundless” or even “interminable” which provoke more the sense of infinity Leopardi was going for.
- There is no translation for “sovrumanì” in English, so inhuman is the most appropriated one, even if the sound of the sentence doesn’t have the same effect as in Italian, even if we try to put there some synonyms like “unnatural”.
- “Fake” wasn’t the right verb to use in that sentence because it didn’t give the sense of imagination as Leopardi wanted, so it has been changed with the verb “fancy” which in fact means “to imagine”.
- The translator forgot all the “and” in the poem which are really important because they create, with the figure of speech of listing, the vastness of what is imagined.
- The last 3 verses had been changed because of a sound incongruity, as they didn’t work like in the Italian version; mostly the last one.
- Even in the English translation, they decided to use undefined verbs with the “ing” form.

This literary translation didn’t work well, that’s why some contemporary English writers took the chance to translate that poem to make a better English version, even if they had to change the rhythm and the structure of the poem. An example is this one which probably impart more the feelings of the original poem:

Ever dear to me was this small hill,
The hedgerow round it that obstructs the view
Of boundless distances where the earth and sky
Merge as one. My sitting there, my gazing out
On spaces limitless, unending silence, on
The depths of quietness my thoughts can sense
Undo the heart almost. I hear the wind
Ruffle the hedgerow and I must go on
Balancing an infinite silence with this voice.
So come to mind the eternal and the dead
Seasons, the present and the living, the sound
Of them: immensities in which my thoughts drown,
Though sweet to me the foundering in such sea.

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