

‘Two Uses for Ashes’: Translation as Forgery
in Anthony Burgess’ Versions of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli

Martin Kratz

In 1978 Anthony Burgess published twelve translations from the original, biblically themed, Romanesco sonnets by the nineteenth-century Roman poet Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli (1791-1863). While ten of Burgess’ poems, printed in the journal *Translation*, have a clear source in poems by Belli, it has been suggested that two of them (‘Two Uses for Ashes’ and ‘The Bet’) are in fact Burgess’ own creations, and not translations at all. As Riccardo Duranti writes, it appears that the ‘prestigious American magazine fell into the trap and published, among several versions of the Biblical sonnets, two original sonnets by Burgess that are little more than bawdy jokes set to verse’.¹ In the context of a journal called *Translation*, the poems are fakes, a literary hoax or forgery - Burgess passed off as Belli. The present essay reflects on how translation, as an act of mediation, appears to offer specific opportunities for the literary forger to stage textual interventions and inventions. In particular, it considers the way in which the ambiguous status of Burgess’ two poems draws attention to the close relationship between literary forgery and literary translation. This association in turn throws light on the similarities between two corresponding fields of study: Translation Studies and the ‘not yet conceptualised field of spuriousity studies’.²

In terms of Translation Studies, Burgess’ poems will be identified as pseudotranslations, that is translations whose provenance is fictional. Spuriousity studies, in turn, theorize, as well as art forgeries and other hoaxes, what K. K. Ruthven terms ‘fake literature’, or ‘any text whose actual provenance differs from what it is made out to be’.³ The capacity of Burgess’ poems to be read in terms of both fields simultaneously reveals the close proximity of these two modes of literary production and the discourses which engage with

them. Furthermore, it engenders a cross-interrogation of each field, within the disputed zone of the poem. The present article contends that within a certain translational milieu, dominated by a desire for what Lawrence Venuti terms ‘fluency’, literary translation and literary forgery temporarily occupy a shared category. Building on Emily Apter’s investigation of ‘translation with no original’, the question of a poem’s status reveals itself not to be fixed in one field or the other, but pivots ultimately on the thin margin between them.⁴ Burgess’ translations of Belli lend themselves particularly well to the exploration of this dynamic, as the poems can be contextualized by Burgess’ repeated articulation of his own position on translation - that translation is not, in fact, possible. As a result of this view, Burgess grants himself a kind of paraphrastic freedom, which means that even the status of his ‘genuine’ translations can be called into doubt.

Among the touchstone texts of ‘fake literature’, one can count the infamous Rowley poems by Thomas Chatterton and the Ireland Shakespeare forgeries. Other works which have been labelled forgeries (or have had their provenance questioned in some other way) are translations. According to Ian Haywood, Alexander Pope was accused of an over-reliance on other translators in his Homer. Pope’s dependence on collaborators (among them James Broome, William Fenton, and Thomas Parnell) spurred his enemies ‘to show that Pope’s Homer was an act of literary deception, one of the first criteria of forgery’.⁵ Another eighteenth-century accusation, made by the poet William Lauder, was that Milton had plagiarized certain Latin poets in writing *Paradise Lost*. It was eventually established that in order to construct his argument, Lauder had himself used existing Latin translations of Milton’s poem, which he then identified as the ‘original’, after first falsely ascribing the translations to earlier writers such as the German Latin poet Masenius.⁶

One of the most disputed translation-forgeries is the Ossianic poem cycle by James Macpherson, published in the second half of the eighteenth century: their status became a

cause célèbre, with Samuel Johnson, as is well known, vociferously joining the doubters. Macpherson's significance to critical discussion of literary forgery is that his poems appear to exemplify the way in which, as Haywood points out, 'most forgeries are not copies', and how 'these paradoxically "original" forgeries are the most interesting and the most subversive', precisely because they challenge 'the cult of the original'.⁷ In Translation Studies the Ossianic poems form a key example of pseudotranslation, i.e. 'texts that are perceived as translations but which are not, as they usually lack an actual source text'.⁸ As translations without a source, pseudotranslations and 'original forgeries' extend a correlative challenge. Each term questions both the status of the category they occupy (forgery/translation), and their status within that category, as well as contesting central and longstanding concerns in that category over the notion of the original. Ultimately, Burgess' Belli translations demonstrate the extent to which, as Emily Apter writes, 'the revelation of translational false coin leaves the reader aware of the dimension of epistemological scam or faked-up alterity inherent in all translation'.⁹

In the 1970s Burgess lived in the Roman district of Trastevere, a district associated with the Roman poet Belli, who Burgess began to translate around this time. A statue in the locality dedicated to Belli bears the inscription AL SUO POETA | G.G. BELLI | IL POPOLO DI ROMA | MCMXIII ('To their poet | G.G. Belli | The people of Rome | 1913'). The inscription is emblematic of the way in which Belli is frequently construed as a poet of the people, specifically the Trasteverian *noantri* ('we others'). This alignment is reinforced by Belli's choice of the Roman language or Romanesco over standard Italian in the over 2,000 sonnets that comprise his *Sonetti romaneschi*, and the way in which, in these poems, Belli conspires with the 'others' against the authorities of the Eternal City that marginalize them.

Burgess' novel *Beard's Roman Women* (1976) includes his first fictional engagement with Belli. Many of the novel's significant events occur in the proximity of the Belli

monument in Trastevere. Part 1 of Burgess' subsequent book *ABBA ABBA* (1977) similarly uses Rome as its stage, but this time for an imagined meeting between Belli and the English Romantic poet John Keats. Translation is a core theme of *ABBA ABBA*. Belli and Keats overcome their communication difficulties by recognizing shared ground in the form of the Petrarchan sonnet - the form transcends the language barrier. The book's title *ABBA ABBA* is a direct reference to the octave of the Petrarchan sonnet, as well as Burgess' initials and the dying words of Christ on the cross in Aramaic. The book also contains several references to translators: John Florio, the English translator of Montaigne; Giovanni Gulielmi, the contemporary who introduces Belli to Keats and who himself translates Byron from English into Tuscan; and Gulielmi's descendant, Joseph John Wilson, to whom Burgess' translations of Belli, which make up Part 2 of the book, are ascribed. What marks Burgess' translations of Belli out from those of other translators is his close adherence to the original Petrarchan rhyme scheme and the consistent use of iambic pentameter.

Mike Stocks argues that Burgess' insistence on maintaining the formal conventions of Belli's poetry comes at the expense of other elements. The result of his choices as translator, according to Stocks, is that Burgess' translations 'can digress from Belli's content so extensively at times as to make for versions that are only lightly related to the originals'.¹⁰ As will be made clear, Burgess himself concedes that a trade-off between form and content does occur in his work on Belli. This should not be understood as some kind of apology. What Stocks observes is the result of a clearly articulated translation strategy on Burgess' part.

In his essay 'Is Translation Possible?' Burgess argues that when translating Belli's poetry 'form is more important than the content', that form is 'a kind of meaning – perhaps more important than the verbal content', and that 'what matters is shape, strict adherence to a sonnet-form which is both vulgar and classical'. He adds finally that 'translation is, I imply, transformation. Content matters less than shape.'¹¹ By intentionally privileging form over

content, however, not only does the content come to demand less fidelity from its translator than the form does; translators are granted (or grant themselves) a creative freedom over the content, through which all manner of liberties can be justified, as long as these continue to serve the prioritizing of formal conventions. In this way, Burgess' stance on translation also begins to create the conditions by which the line between translation and forgery in his work can be blurred.

Burgess defends his use of poetic licence in translation by insisting that 'Belli ceases to be Belli when he ceases to be Roman', and claims to want to convey no more than 'something of the Belli flavour. Something is something, if it is not everything.' The genuine Belli, Burgess writes, needs to be read in the original Romanesco. Burgess proposes that the function of his own translations is to 'draw a few people to him [Belli] in his native dress and habitat'.¹² What is possible in translation, writes Burgess, is that 'a kind of mutual fruitfulness may come about from even a marginal contact between Italian and English'.¹³ However, to pretend that a more far-reaching translation is possible, beyond this 'marginal contact', Burgess suggests, is impossible. Don Nichol concurs when he writes that 'Belli's language defies translation; his argot cannot be transported across linguistic boundaries without losing a greater part of its essence, its vitality, its gutsy Roman brusqueness.'¹⁴ The precarious line Burgess treads results from taking the implications of Nichol's statement and extending them ever further: the fact that translation is not possible at all grants the translator increasing freedom, and increasingly less responsibility.

Other critics maintain that the freedom Burgess allows himself in translation pays off in the outcome. Riccardo Duranti argues that Burgess' 'strategic choice of getting away from the standard criteria of faithfulness in translation ... do[es] not prevent Burgess from giving his readers a fair picture of Belli's work and from reaching some effective results'. At the same time though, he criticizes Burgess for employing a 'unified and individual speaking

voice'. Invoking the expression 'traduttore traditore', Duranti describes this as 'the greatest betrayal [Burgess] commits against Belli's intention'. Duranti writes that Burgess' 'diction is a highly idiosyncratic and cultivated one', but 'the roots of his language do not reach deep down into the language of a community as Belli's do'. He suggests that 'what is missing in [Burgess'] versions is the voice, better yet, the voices, of the multifarious popular persona Belli adopted as the collective protagonist of his work'.¹⁵ As will become clear, the charge levelled against Burgess' use of high-flown language, and in particular the misjudged tone of the persona, are echoed in several criticisms of his translations. However, the two fakes in particular will also demonstrate that a high level of anxiety around questions of language and community are in fact very much at the heart of these translations.

The few Burgess translations which succeed in coming close to what appears to be a critical consensus about what a Belli poem *ought* to sound like in English are those in which Burgess uses, most extensively, elements of Lancashire dialect. As Paul Howard writes, in the poem 'Martha and Mary', for instance, 'Burgess adopts the traditional method of representing the long-stigmatized glottalization associated with the lower-classes of the industrial North'. However, while Howard feels this brings him much closer to Belli, he also concludes that 'the trouble is, he doesn't do it enough'.¹⁶ Carol O'Sullivan also suggests that 'the dialectical, "Lancashire" elements of Burgess' translations take some finding'.¹⁷ While all three commentators recognize that Burgess makes deliberate choices in prioritizing the sonnet form over content, and that by doing this he is able to render certain elements of Belli's 'flavour', Burgess' translations are repeatedly criticized for showing a lack of fidelity to the original poems. They do this particularly in terms of their speaker-position, which is singular rather than plural, 'cultivated', as Duranti writes, rather than being 'of a community'.

Burgess' two fakes, 'Two Uses of Ashes' and 'The Bet', are among the few poems in which dialect is prominent. As published in the journal *Translation*, the contested poems appear under the following heading:

Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli

SONNETS

*Translated from the Romanesco (Roman dialect) by Anthony Burgess and excerpted from his novel ABBA ABBA.*¹⁸

In *ABBA ABBA*, however, 'The Bet' and 'Two Uses for Ashes' appear not as Belli's poems at all, but as the early work of J. J. Wilson, Burgess' fictional translator. In the novel, Wilson is born in Manchester and is assisted in his translations by the Romanesco-speaking Susanna Roberti. Readers familiar with the way Burgess blurs autobiography and fiction will recognize the similarity between Joseph John Wilson's name and Burgess': John Anthony Burgess Wilson. The similarity extends to the birthdays of Burgess and his fictional double (one year apart), and their shared birthplace in the North of England. The similarities continue in terms of the process of translation. Living in Bracciano, near Rome, Burgess enlisted the help of Susan Roberts to translate the Romanesco originals into English prose transcriptions, from which he then worked.¹⁹

A brief consideration of Burgess' fictionalization of the process of translation sheds some light on the status of the poems at the centre of this article. Given the significant similarities between Wilson and Burgess, Burgess' description of Wilson is telling:

J. J. Wilson was himself no poet. He made a strict distinction, even as a schoolboy, between the art of poetry and the craft of verse. His approach to the craft of the

Petrarchan sonnet may be seen in three versifyings of low jokes made at the age of eighteen and submitted to the school magazine. They were rejected but not before they had, by some oversight, got into the galley proof.²⁰

A degree of anxiety about being a fake of some kind is evident in Burgess/Wilson's assertion that he 'was himself no poet'. The fact that he later grows up to become a translator makes translation into an activity pursued by those who do not have it in them to be the 'real' thing. The fact that the fictional poems 'had, by some oversight, got into the galley proof' curiously foreshadows the inclusion in *Translation* of Burgess' two 'low jokes' later on. The passage is a reminder of the possibility that their publication was not a wilful fraud, but rather an editorial accident. The translation scenario is also fictionalized along similar lines in *Beard's Roman Women*. In this earlier novel, the protagonist enlists his Roman girlfriend, Paola, to help with the Romanesco language. The character of Paola is based on Burgess' second wife Liana, to whom the book is dedicated, and who was herself an Italian translator of Burgess' novels:

Beard had determined to read and understand a Belli sonnet every day, with Paola's help, perhaps later to translate and publish, in some arty bold journal of America, twenty or more of the more obscene sonnets, so that he could be more than a mere script-maker.²¹

In the 'arty bold journal of America' that Beard imagines here, one is reminded again of the American journal *Translation*, in which Burgess would eventually publish his 'fakes'.

This quotation from *Beard's Roman Women* demonstrates that the subject of authenticity in Burgess' work goes much further than the question of translation. The last

words are suggestive of a powerful anxiety towards the protagonist's (and, given the consistent blurring of autobiography and fiction in Burgess' work, the author's own) chosen metier and the desire to be recognized as a 'real' writer and not 'a mere script-maker'. Questions of authenticity, in other words, are not only raised in the act of translation, but permeate Burgess' work as a whole. In the same way that the subject of translation and the figure of the translator feature extensively in Burgess' criticism and fiction, literary theft and situations of ambiguous textual provenance occur too. In fact, Burgess is mentioned in at least two critical texts on fake literature. In a special edition of the journal *Angelaki* on 'Narratives of Forgery', Nichol points out that several plagiarists feature as characters in Burgess' work.²² In Haywood, a discussion of the ambiguous status of a 'real' (as opposed to 'fake') novel like *Robinson Crusoe* - an ambiguity caused by the way it is framed as a true account - contains Burgess' remarks that 'Defoe keeps a straight face, but everybody knows it is a novel.'²³ This assertion will become one way of understanding Burgess' own publication of his two 'fakes', particularly given the nature of the phrase 'to keep a straight face', and the fact that both sonnets are jokes.

Despite the way in which the poems are framed in *ABBA ABBA*, the outcome is the same: in *Translation*, 'The Bet' and 'Two Uses for Ashes' are published with other translations under Belli's name as Belli poems. The poems not only sit alongside the 'genuine' translations, they also meet some of the criteria which critics consider many of Burgess' 'genuine' translations do not. 'Two Uses for Ashes', for instance, consists of two accounts by widows who have recently cremated their husbands, telling an unidentified listener what they will do with the ashes. In the first place, this poem exemplifies a use of voices rather than voice, with the octet and sestet spoken by different people. The sense of plurality is enhanced by the conversational tone, which implies the presence of a listener or of listeners ("The ashes of my dear departed?" said | The widow, serving tea and cakes at

five'). It is further amplified by the difference in the speakers' accents, the second of which suggests a regional provenance, specifically, as will be demonstrated, the Manchester of Burgess' childhood.

Despite the plurality of voices, though, Burgess' persona fails to identify with any particular group. In the context of the 'genuine' translations, Howard describes this effect as being particularly evident in Burgess' 'flattening out of names'.²⁴ Where in Belli the names are sometimes presented in an affectionate diminutive, in the Burgess poems the diminutive is incongruous given the Burgess-persona's remove from the poem's subjects. Instead, Howard points out, the names often disappear altogether. This behaviour, which Howard observes in the 'genuine' translations, can also be recognized in the case of Burgess' 'fakes'. In 'The Bet' and 'Two Uses for Ashes', the subjects, too, are anonymous, and the opportunity to identify with the poem's subject through the use of this device is forfeited.

The criticism of the speaker-position in these poems, however, is a comment on Burgess' translations *as* translations. It does not speak to their status as fakes. What makes the two poems questionable is not the choices Burgess makes as a translator, but the nature of the poems' provenance and the difficulty of establishing their origin. Belli wrote over 2,000 sonnets, not all of which have been translated into English. The possibility of identifying this kind of fraud is thus confined not only to Italianists but to Romanesco speakers. Even for a Belli scholar, the solution would effectively be a process of elimination. A search by title would not suffice, as the titles are an element of the poems which Burgess often adjusts substantially. In other words, the sphere of mediation within which the translator necessarily operates presents the literary forger with the opportunity to obscure the provenance of the text.

A sphere of mediation in translation between a source text and its intended readership is created in the first place through the difference in language. In the case of the Burgess-

Belli translations, the sphere is restricted by the fact that the source language is spoken by only a small group of people, within a particular geographic locale. Other factors that affect the size of the sphere of mediation include the temporal division between the translation and its original, and, as Susan Stewart points out in *Crimes of Writing*, the division between oral and written cultures. All three aspects are used in the Macpherson poems, as these are presented as being carried into contemporary written English from the ancient, oral Gaelic. The effect is that the more layers of mediation confront the reader, the less likely the reader is to be able to verify the translation against the original. The guise of translation can create new space within which literary innovation as well as critical intervention, of literary, social, and political kinds, can take place.²⁵

For the forger, the sphere of mediation offers certain advantages. The greater the sphere of mediation, the more the translator's work must be taken on faith. As Stewart points out, however, where mediation draws attention to itself - from 'a sense of distance between one era and another, one worldview and another; a sense of historical periodization, transformation, and even rupture' - questions of authenticity always surface.²⁶ Thus where translation is perceived as a mediatory mode, as disruptive or transformative, it raises by its nature questions of authenticity and provenance. As well as opportunity, then, the sphere of mediation extends challenges to the forger. The more control a forger can exercise over it, the better.

As well as being his translator, Burgess' limited selection of translations (seventy-one from Belli's thousands) places him in the position of acting as Belli's editor in English. His selection is deliberately restricted to blasphemous poems, and Burgess' selection gives the Anglophone reader a particularly narrow view of the Roman poet's œuvre. As Howard outlines, this has in part to do with the fact that Burgess draws considerably on a religiously themed, pre-existing selection in Italian, *La Bibbia del Belli* (1974) by Pietro Gibellini.

Howard even suggests that Burgess' use of Gibellini is so extensive that alterations of certain poem titles and the inclusion of a handful of other poems 'smacks of an attempt to avoid potential charges of lifting the compilation directly from another source'.²⁷

To some extent, Burgess' narrow range is in keeping with Belli's publication history. Published 1886-9 by Luigi Morandi, Belli's collected sonnets first appeared in six volumes. The publisher decided to arrange them in a way that meant the sixth volume contained all of Belli's poems most likely to cause offence. This sixth volume became the best-selling volume of the set, but left Belli, Howard writes, 'with something of a one-dimensional reputation'.²⁸ This reputation for obscenity is something critics of Belli have sought to redress, but Burgess' poems, in particular his two 'fakes', deliberately emphasize and attempt to draw on it. Burgess himself wrote:

The one thing that draws my translations of Belli away from the centralised literary tradition of English – a tradition of good manners and polite speech – is the blasphemous obscenity, which can, of course, be rendered very accurately into even the English of the Royal Family (the Duke of Edinburgh, consort to the Queen, is a naval officer and is fluent in obscenity when occasion asks for it).²⁹

In terms of trying to recognize a poem *as* translation or forgery, Burgess' editorship means he constructs or at least contributes to the context within which his poems are to be judged. Overall, Burgess' 'fakes' can be criticized for exactly the same reasons as his 'genuine' poems: the speaker's tone is aloof and there is an overt emphasis on the 'obscene' elements of Belli's language. But whether or not this demonstrates fidelity to the original does not actually matter. The translations, genuine and fake, only need to be consistent with each other.

In this sense, Burgess' translation practice evidences what Emily Apter calls 'textual cloning', by which a cloned text results not from its engagement with an original source text, but rather from the replication of a code. According to Apter, while pseudotranslation is bound up with the traditional paradigm by which a translation starts from at least a notional original, 'textual cloning' results 'from a kind of test tube text of simulated originality; a text, if you will, that is unnaturally or artificially birthed and successfully replicated'.³⁰ In Burgess' case, the code comprises those features of his Belli translations that make them identifiably Burgess'. The result is a poem which, while looking and sounding in many ways just like translations of Belli by Burgess, does not find its starting point in a poem by Belli, but in Burgess' manner of rendering Belli. However, in the instance of the Burgess Belli translations, the notion of 'textual cloning' is problematized by the fact that even though stylistically there is a kind of replication of the sort Apter describes, the two fakes do in fact appear to draw on a specific textual provenance. It is simply not the provenance they at first appear to declare.

The consistency between the 'fake' poems and the 'genuine' translations only holds as long as the provenance of the poems is not scrutinized. 'Two Uses for Ashes', in particular, is complicated by the fact that it draws heavily on Burgess' autobiographical account of his own origins. In his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God*, Burgess' description of his landlord grandfather sounds almost like a Bellian character:

My grandfather stayed where he was – in the Derby Inn, with the odd trip to Blackpool. He tapped barrels, removed the bungs and hammered in the vent-peg; he ranged the bottles; he served. His customers had names like Charlie Hetherington, Joe Higginbottom, Alec Warburton, Jim Shufflebottom, Jack Bamber, Albert Preston, Fred Whittle. There was one heavy beer-drinker called Taypot.

Like the *noantri* of Trastevere, Burgess' grandfather is rooted in a specific geographic and linguistic locale, in contrast to Burgess' own generation who lost their accents when they 'sought jobs outside the native province'. The passage goes on to reveal that it may be, in fact, from Burgess' grandfather that the sonnet 'Two Uses for Ashes' derives:

To these customers my grandfather would tell stories he handed on to my father and thus to me. They were brutal jokes in the Lancashire tradition, much possessed by death and deformity ... There was also the grim story of the widow who kept her husband's ashes and took them as snuff. Why? Bugger was up every other 'ole of me body when he was alive he can 'ave these now he's dead. A gentler story about husbands' ashes concerned the woman who kept them in an egg timer. Bugger did no work living so now's his chance.³¹

In these two stories, one can clearly recognize the separate parts of Burgess' sonnet in reverse:

"The ashes of my dear departed?" said
 The widow, serving tea and cakes at five,
 Five days after the funeral. "I contrive
 To house them aptly. No, not lapped in lead.
 See, they are in an egg timer instead,
 There on the mantelpiece. Ah, ladies, I've
 Determined, since he did no work alive,
 The lazy pig shall do some now he's dead."

One widow took her man's remains as snuff,
 Achieving an orgasmic kind of sneeze.
 She said: "The bugger's appetite was rough.
 He hentered, without even saying please,
 My hother hapertures. Enough's enough.
 But as he's dead I'll not begrudge him these."³²

Burgess' autobiography elaborates on the second widow in Burgess' poem, and the fact that the misapplication of the aspirated aitch is to some extent a question of geography. On elocution lessons at college, Burgess writes that of various unfamiliar sounds 'there was also aitch, acceptable as a Catholic consonant, but foreign to the Manchester phonemic inventory'.³³

Burgess associates the aitch with one person in particular, his stepmother (herself twice a widow), who 'was rigorously consistent in her aitchlessness. When she said, as she regularly did, that she had a 'orrible 'eadache, she did not understand my father's wit when he said all she needed was a couple of aspirates'.³⁴ In the context of the autobiography, Burgess' removed tone, which he employs in his Belli translations too, is condescending rather than sympathetic. If there is an opportunity to create a sense of conspiracy between the persona and the marginalized subject(s) of the texts (who are also the butt of the joke) against an oppressive authority, it is not taken.

Nonetheless, at first it would appear that 'Two Uses for Ashes' disproves Duranti's assertion that 'the roots of [Burgess'] language do not reach deep down into the language of a community as Belli's do'. In fact, it seems to draw on a highly personal history of that community. However, the provenance of the sonnet is further complicated by the fact that even his grandfather, as source of the poem, can be called into question. In one account from

English Journey, J. B. Priestley describes being in a small pub in Manchester, where after a heavy Lancashire meal of black pudding and meat pie, his hosts began to tell stories.

Priestley writes that ‘some of the stories, told in broad Lancashire, were excellent; they had the right grimly ironical quality’. Bringing to mind Morandi’s division of Belli’s sonnets into volumes of the acceptable and unacceptable, Priestley notes that some of the stories he heard could not be ‘repeated for a mixed audience’. Of particular note, however, he recalls one that was structured as a dialogue, and which significantly resembles Burgess’ sonnet. A widowed weaver from Blackburn discusses with her friend how she intends to cremate her husband and place the ashes in an egg timer:

“Where yer going to bury ’im?” a neighbour asked her. “Ah’m not going to bury ’im,” she replied. “Well, what are yer going to do wi’ ’im?” she was asked. “Ah’m going to ave ’im cremated,” she replied. The neighbour was impressed. “But whatever will yer do wi’ th’ashes?” she enquired. “Ah’ll tell yer what Ah’m going to do wi’ th’ashes,” said the widow. “Ah’m going to ‘ave ’em put into an egg-timer. Th’owd devil wouldn’t ever work when ’e wer alive, so ’e can start doing a bit now ’e’s deead.”³⁵

Burgess knew and admired Priestley, and it is likely that Burgess would have been aware of this story. This does not necessarily rule out his having known it before having read Priestley. As a more recent newspaper article testifies,³⁶ the story seems to carry enough regional currency to recur at regular intervals. In this case, the real-life widow who had her husband’s ashes placed in an egg timer was Brenda Eccles, from Oldham, Greater Manchester. More importantly, the inclusion of this well-used story in Burgess’ sonnet strongly suggests that ‘Two Uses for Ashes’ is not a translation of a Belli poem.

One of the difficulties in establishing the status of any text as a literary forgery is the slippery status of the term itself, and the many other labels that the broader idea of fake literature accommodates. Nick Groom identifies several key terms including ‘forgery’ and ‘hoaxing’.³⁷ The case of those Burgess-Belli ‘translations’ in which Burgess appears to attribute his own ‘original’ work to Belli, in Groom’s terms at least, constitute literary forgery, because they attempt to attribute a text to another author. This is otherwise known as ‘allonymity’. Burgess’ fake translations demonstrate fraudulent behaviour in other ways too. Ruthven explores how a key dynamic in literary forgery is often situated between the forger and specific critics, rather than between forger and reader. This is what Groom understands under the term ‘hoax’ - a text that aims to show up the ignorance of an expert. An element of this is in evidence in the case of ‘Two Uses for Ashes’, at least according to Duranti, when he describes the editors of *Translation* (‘a prestigious American magazine’) as having fallen ‘into the trap’. The idea of a ‘trap’ suggests the poems are bait aimed at catching or rather catching out a specific person or kind of person.

When Ruthven describes the approach of the art forger Eric Hebborn and what makes a particular kind of deceit succeed against critics, the strategy echoes the behaviour of Apter’s ‘textual cloning’. Rather than create a forgery based on one’s own interpretation of a particular work, a successful forger caters instead to the critical consensus about the original existing at a given moment.³⁸ The ‘code’ is established by the critics and taken advantage of by the forger. This is complicated in the case of Burgess’ fakes, however, by the fact that Burgess sets himself up as both expert and forger. Translation of Belli’s poems into English had a by no means extensive history at the time of the publication of *ABBA ABBA* in 1977, even if the first example dates from as long ago as 1874. Stocks’ recent overview of Belli’s publication history (n. 10) records only four significant English translators before Burgess’ publication in 1977. The last translator of note was Harold Norse, who published his

translations in 1960. Burgess cements this authority by reviewing contemporary publications of Belli poems, and producing essays on Belli and translation.³⁹ It is Burgess, as Belli's most popular champion (if not his most authoritative), who was fuelling the conversation about Belli in English.

The translation was not well received among some experts at the time, however. In 1978 Guido Almansi dismissed the Burgess translations ('if this is the right word for them') out of hand. Of five poems published in the *TLS*, Almansi writes:

The sonnets were well known, though it was quite difficult to recognise their authentic authorship after Burgess' lewd treatment. The translator isolated many obscene and blasphemous elements, separating the iconoclastic atrocities from the jargon of cynicism and despair uttered by Belli's plebeian spokesman ... Burgess however only believes he can extract, say, five dirty jokes from five great sonnets.⁴⁰

If one considers Burgess' 'fakes' in terms of the same language Almansi directs at the 'genuine' translations, there is little difference between them. In Almansi's analysis, the translations are judged on the way they obscure the poem's 'authentic authorship'. The authorship of the two fakes is, for different reasons, similarly obscured. All the key criticisms of Burgess' translations (and by implication his 'fakes') are present in Almansi's review too: the excessive freedoms Burgess takes, the reduction of Belli's reputation to the 'obscene and blasphemous', and the miscalculated tone of Burgess' persona. Almansi's particularly germane description of Burgess' translations as 'dirty jokes' suggests that while 'Two Uses for Ashes' and 'The Bet' would not pass as plausible Belli poems in his estimation, neither do the 'genuine' translations. The expression 'dirty jokes' also confirms the extent to which the two 'fakes' are consistent, if not with Belli's canon, then at least with the tone of Burgess'

other translations of Belli. In this sense, Burgess has not faked Belli poems, as such; he has actually forged his own style of translation.

Whether Burgess' fakes were anything as calculated as a hoax is difficult to know. By his own standards, he may be, like the 'real' writer Defoe whom he is describing, simply trying to 'keep a straight face'. The question is whether or not Burgess does enough to indicate this. In terms of his readers, is Burgess laughing with them, or at their expense? What, in short, is the extent of Burgess' literary crime, if one has been committed at all?

Ruthven suggests a number of criteria in terms of which a literary forgery, and Burgess' efforts, may be measured. These include 'the scale of an enterprise' and 'the degree of difficulty'.⁴¹ Burgess' fakes seem not to rate highly on either scale. Duranti is the only critic discussed here to mention the forgeries, and, in his article, they feature as no more than a parenthetical aside. For Burgess' first biographer, Roger Lewis, they might provide more evidence of Burgess' status as a 'genuine fake'.⁴² Burgess' himself appears to endorse this when he writes of his time in Trastevere that 'I felt myself one with the bad sculptors and fakers of antique furniture'.⁴³ On the one hand, he appears not to identify with the 'original' poet, but with the creators of derivatives. On the other hand, perhaps this identification with the Trasteverian furniture fakers is an acknowledgement of what Burgess perceives to be the 'real' originals: those from whose language and lives Belli's poems are *derived*. In this scenario, Belli is no more 'original' than Burgess.

An alternative reading would be that despite Burgess proclaiming an identification with fakers and forgers, his literary behaviour suggests otherwise. In *ABBA ABBA*, for instance, the poems are dismissed as being no more than the inexperienced juvenilia of the translator, Wilson. Even in *Translation* it is difficult to take the poems as a genuine attempt at forgery. Ruthven suggests that part of the thrill of forgery is leaving clues behind, because 'clue-planting intensifies the vertigo of deception'. It is also possible, however, that the

biographical elements of Burgess' poems, rather than being a forger's clue, demonstrate an actual attempt at *being* Belli - at fidelity not only to the *Sonetti romaneschi* but to the community and language he is translating into.⁴⁴ This attempt, however, is undermined by the literary anxieties that return repeatedly in Burgess' work and the complicated relationship he has with his own background. These anxieties are exemplified by the appearances in Burgess' writings of Geoffrey Grigson, a contemporary who according to Burgess described his personality as 'coarse and unattractive'. Burgess' view was that Grigson, 'son of an Anglican country vicar, was acknowledging an alien culture gruffly subsisting outside the covenant of the Protestant establishment'.⁴⁵ Burgess' identification as 'alien' puts him again in closer relation to the *noantri* themselves than to Belli. There is also perhaps a limited sense in which he accepts Grigson's put-down with a degree of pride. After all, Burgess writes in praise of Belli that he stands for 'the earthy, coarse, unregenerable'.⁴⁶

Who then, in the Keatsian sense, is the great 'presider' over Burgess' translations and fakes? Is it perhaps Keats' own dedicatee Thomas Chatterton, who is a kind of patron saint of literary forgers? Or is it Belli? The fact is that what the 'fakes' do more than anything is throw the spotlight back onto Burgess' 'genuine' translations, and the idea of genuine translation itself. In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti describes the dominance, in the prevailing translation culture in the United Kingdom and the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century, of translation strategies that create 'the appearance ... that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the "original".' The aim of so-called 'domesticating' strategies is to make the poem seem as if it had been written in English in the first place. This is achieved by what Venuti terms 'transparency', choosing a stylistic fluency which smooths over idiosyncrasies in language, and minimizing the presence of the interlocuting translator. With regard to this process, Venuti's description of translation both draws on the semantic field of fake literature, and strikingly echoes the mechanics of forgery.

In the same way that a forgery employs certain devices in order to obscure its origins and to disguise its inauthenticity, ‘the effect of transparency conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made’. The translation in this milieu is seen as ‘derivative, false, potentially a fake copy’.⁴⁷

A ‘foreignizing’ strategy, by contrast, does not need to attempt to disguise a translation’s status, and can, to an extent, insist on it. By ‘deviating from native norms to stage an alien reading experience’, foreignizing translation is free to articulate a text’s status as translation. Such a deviation can be created, for instance, by using ‘a marginal discourse’.⁴⁸ In this sense, a stronger commitment to dialect on Burgess’ part might have been evidence of a clearer ‘foreignizing’ strategy. It would have challenged the cultural dominance of standard English, in a way that is representative of the position of Belli’s own Romanesco poems with respect to standard Italian. Robert Garioch’s translations of Belli into Scots are an example of this strategy being employed. However, from the perspective of a Scots dialect speaker, Garioch’s translations are arguably domesticating, which suggests that the use of foreignizing strategies does not necessarily preclude the visibility of a translation as a translation.

In fact, Burgess uses a mixture of both domesticating and foreignizing elements in his work. On the one hand, he deliberately chooses to minimize the amount of Lancashire dialect in the poems in order ‘to make [Belli] known to as large a new public as possible’. On the other hand, Burgess articulates certain elements of his poems (‘the blasphemous obscenity’) that he deliberately emphasizes for their *foreignizing* quality (‘that draws my translations of Belli away from the centralised literary tradition of English’). In the same way that Burgess as translator employs a number of different translation strategies, he is not offering a definitive version of Belli in his texts either. His allymonious fakes are in this sense

ultimately an extension of, and not a deviation from, a translation practice that treats the limits of the text as undetermined.

When Blanton writes that ‘in effect, forgeries can signify their origins, originals cannot’, the same can be said of translations. Furthermore, the same sphere of mediation that creates opportunities for the literary forger, by its very existence, casts its shadow on ‘legitimate’ translation practice, a constant, uncomfortable reminder of the potential for betrayal. As this essay has suggested, the possibility of translation and the possibility of deceit go hand in hand. In other ways, translation is an inversion of the mechanics of forgery, particularly with regard to one of forgery’s inherent contradictions. A forgery, writes C. D. Blanton, ‘functions only so long as it conceals itself, remains something other than itself. With the declaration of its actual status, it ceases to operate as a forgery at all’.⁴⁹ A translation is the opposite. If it does not declare its status, its particular relationship to an original, it fails to operate as translation, and pretends to function as an original. In fact, if it does not declare its status, and adheres, in particular, too strongly to those domesticating strategies which render the translator invisible, a translation effectively becomes a literary forgery. In the issue of translation *as* forgery, the question is not one of different statuses, but of the declaration of status.

This discussion began by considering the similarities between the modes of literary translation and literary forgery, principally in terms of the way translation offers (and has offered throughout history) particular opportunities for the literary forger to exploit. To conclude, several areas for further research may be suggested, based on the increasingly reciprocal relationship between translation and forgery that has been touched on. There are areas of considerable overlap not simply in the parallel between literary forgery and translation as two modes that respond to a notional original, but also between the bodies of criticism associated with each. These areas intersect in several ways. Chantal Wright’s

suggestion that we consider ‘translation as an intense form of reading that might be described as a type of literary criticism’,⁵⁰ for instance, echoes Ruthven’s assertion that ‘literary forgery is criticism by other means’.⁵¹ Similarly, when Venuti argues in *The Scandals of Translation* that translation is ‘stigmatized as a form of writing’ because of the challenge it extends to ‘the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions’,⁵² one is made to think of Ruthven’s point with regard to the potential for literary forgeries to do the same.⁵³

Venuti sees the treatment of translation as scandalous; other translation scholars such as Apter have argued that there is already something suspect about translation. Philip E. Lewis too suggests, indirectly (via Derrida), that the binary of translation and forgery is not a simple opposition; rather, these two modes inhabit each other. Lewis does this when he refers to Derrida’s statement that ‘a “good” translation must always commit abuses’. To gloss this proposition, Lewis retranslates it from the French as ‘a good translation must always play tricks’. What Lewis is driving at in his retranslation is what gets lost in the translation of the French term *abuser*, which, unlike the English *abuse*, implies a sense of the ‘false, deceptive, misleading’.⁵⁴ In the sense of his discussion, then, I might abuse Lewis’ translations, and write that a good translation must always commit forgery. Rather than simply exploit the opportunities translation offers, techniques of literary forgery may also be used by translators, or are in fact a necessity to them. Consider the use of ‘authenticity effects’, ‘the discursive reproduction of which enables any text that contains them to be read as authentic, irrespective of its provenance’.⁵⁵ To what extent can one recognize their use, for instance, in certain modes of translation, to create the effect of fluency, and the impression that the translation is the original? Wright suggests that ‘translation is, in a sense, iconic of the literary; it foregrounds textual possibility, literary capacity, refracted through the person of the translator’.⁵⁶ Without suggesting there is no difference between translation and forgery, I

would argue that through the person of the forger, literary forgery also does just this, albeit unjustly.

Manchester Metropolitan University

This article was made possible by the AHRC Cultural Engagement Fund, and the support of Manchester Metropolitan University and the International Anthony Burgess Foundation.

¹ Riccardo Duranti, 'The Paradox of Distance: Belli Translated into English and Scots', *New Comparison*, 8 (1989), 36-44 (p. 40).

² K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 199.

³ Ruthven., p. 39.

⁴ Emily Apter, 'Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textural Reproduction', in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, edited by Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ, 2005), pp. 159-74.

⁵ Ian Haywood, *Faking It: Art and the Politics of Forgery* (New York, 1987), p. 32.

⁶ See Paul Baines, *The House of Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 82.

⁷ Haywood, p. 10.

⁸ Paolo Rambelli, 'Pseudotranslation', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, second edn (London, 2009), p. 209.

⁹ Apter, p. 167.

¹⁰ G. G. Belli, *Sonnets*, translated by Mike Stocks (Richmond, 2007), p. 158.

¹¹ Anthony Burgess, 'Is Translation Possible?', *Translation: The Journal of Literary Translation*, 12 (1984), 3-7 (pp. 5-7).

¹² Anthony Burgess, 'Belli into English' (1977), page 4 of 4, unpublished typescript held at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation (IABF), Manchester.

-
- ¹³ Anthony Burgess, 'Writing in Rome', *TLS*, 31 October 1975, p. 1296.
- ¹⁴ Don W. Nichol, 'Belli up to Date: Scots and English Sonnet Translations by Robert Garioch and Anthony Burgess', *Chapman*, 39 (1984), 34-41 (p. 36).
- ¹⁵ Duranti (n. 15), p. 40.
- ¹⁶ Howard, "'Alright, That's Not a Literal Translation": Cribs, Licence, and Embellishment in the Burgess Versions of Belli's *Sonetti Romaneschi*', *MLR*, 108 (2013), 700-20 (pp. 710, 711).
- ¹⁷ Carol O'Sullivan, 'Acts of Literary Impertinence: Translating Belli's *romanesco* Sonnets', in *Twentieth-Century Poetic Translation: Literary Cultures in Italian and English*, edited by Daniela Caselli and Daniela La Penna (London, 2008), pp. 85-98 (p. 89).
- ¹⁸ G. G. Belli and Anthony Burgess, 'Sonnets', *Translation: The Journal of Literary Translation*, 5 (1978), 26-34 (p. 26).
- ¹⁹ For an extensive analysis of Roberts' role in the creative process of the Burgess-Belli translations see Howard.
- ²⁰ Anthony Burgess, *ABBA ABBA* (London, 1977), pp. 87-8.
- ²¹ Anthony Burgess, *Beard's Roman Women* (London, 1977), p. 36.
- ²² Don W. Nichol, 'Rewriting Plagiarism', *Angelaki*, 1 (1994), 13-22 (p. 17).
- ²³ Haywood (n. 5), p. 26.
- ²⁴ Howard, 'Cribs, Licence, and Embellishment' (n. 16), p. 709.
- ²⁵ This point is made by Rambelli (n. 8), pp. 209-10.
- ²⁶ Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (London, 1994), p. 105.
- ²⁷ Howard, 'Cribs, Licence, and Embellishment', p. 703.

²⁸ Howard, 'Belli's Silent Revolution', in *The Politics of Poetics: Poetry and Social Activism in Early-Modern through Contemporary Italy*, edited by Federica Santini and Giovanna Summerfield (Newcastle, 2013), pp. 29-62 (p. 34).

²⁹ Burgess, 'Belli into English' (n. 12), p. 3.

³⁰ Apter (n. 4), p. 161.

³¹ Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London, 2012), p. 12.

³² Burgess, *ABBA ABBA*, p. 88.

³³ Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 98.

³⁴ Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 48.

³⁵ J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Ilkley, 2012), p. 211.

³⁶ 'Hard-boiled husband turns in his grave', *The Independent*, 13 July 1997.

³⁷ Nick Groom, 'Romanticism and Forgery', *Literature Compass*, 4 (2007), 1625-49 (pp. 1633-4).

³⁸ Ruthven (n. 2), p. 173.

³⁹ See Burgess, 'Petrarch of the Roman Gutter', *TLS*, 17 January 1992.

⁴⁰ Guido Almansi, 'Burgess and Belli', *London Magazine*, 18 (1978), 58-61 (pp. 58-9).

⁴¹ Ruthven, pp. 177-8.

⁴² Roger Lewis, *Anthony Burgess* (London, 2002), p. 407.

⁴³ Anthony Burgess, *One Man's Chorus* (New York, 1998), p. 67.

⁴⁴ Ruthven, p. 174.

⁴⁵ Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Anthony Burgess, *You've Had Your Time: Being the Second Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess* (London, 2002), p. 323. Like Burgess, Geoffrey Grigson is also mentioned in Haywood's *Faking It*, in a case in which Grigson accuses D. M. Thomas of plagiarism. (p. 136)

⁴⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, second edn (London, 2008), pp. 1, 6.

⁴⁸ Venuti, *Invisibility*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ C. D. Blanton, 'Impostures: Robert Browning and the Poetics of Forgery', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 35 (2002), 1-25 (p. 2).

⁵⁰ Chantal Wright, *Literary Translation* (London, 2016), p. 18.

⁵¹ Ruthven (n. 2), p. 171.

⁵² Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards and Ethics of Difference* (London, 1998), p. 1.

⁵³ Ruthven, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Phillip E. Lewis, 'The Measure of Translation Effects', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, third edn, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London, 2012), pp. 220-9 (pp. 225, 221).

⁵⁵ Ruthven, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Wright, p. 63.