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COMPLUTENSE

Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*: Translation analysis and interpretive issues

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Abstract. This paper aims to emphasize the importance of interpretation in the translation process and the implications deriving from it, as well as their effect on the reader. This subject matter will be examined through one of Italo Calvino's best-known works, more specifically *The Invisible Cities* (translated by William Weaver). This is a work that can be ascribed to one of the branches of travel literature, namely the imaginary voyage. Through the examination of certain stylistic, grammatical, and lexical choices made by the translator, some portions of the text will be highlighted, in which the construction of meaning differs from that of the source language, thus distorting the textual cooperation whose protagonist is the reader (Eco, 1979).
Keywords: Translation; Italo Calvino; Invisible Cities

[es] *Las ciudades invisibles*, de Italo Calvino: análisis de la traducción y cuestiones de interpretación

Resumen. Este trabajo pretende destacar la importancia de la interpretación en el proceso de traducción, las implicaciones que se derivan de ella, así como su efecto en el lector. Este tema se examinará a través de una de las obras más conocidas de Italo Calvino, concretamente *Las ciudades invisibles* (traducida por William Weaver), una obra que puede adscribirse a una de las ramas de la literatura de viajes, la del viaje imaginario. A través del examen de determinadas elecciones estilísticas, gramaticales y léxicas realizadas por el traductor, se pondrán de manifiesto algunas partes del texto en las que la construcción del significado difiere de la de la lengua de partida, distorsionando así la cooperación textual cuyo protagonista es el lector (Eco, 1979).
Palabras clave: Traducción; Italo Calvino; *Las ciudades invisibles*

1. Introduction

The idea of a deeper analysis of the translation of Invisible Cities occurred after reading Calvino's correspondence; in one of his letters to Guido Almansi (Calvino 2014: 439-440), which dates back to February 1974, Calvino wrote: "Weaver has now finished the translation (which is not entirely felicitous)."

Being a translator himself (although not very prolific) and, above all, often dealing with translations in his position at the Einaudi Publishing Company, Calvino had developed his own ideas on translation, which can be summed up in this sentence: "A critical assessment of a translation must be conducted methodically, sampling extracts that are quite substantial and that can act as crucial litmus-tests […] authors are only read properly when they are translated, or one can compare the original text with its translation, or compare different versions in more than one language" (Calvino 2014: 248).

Part of this work is inspired by Professor Martin McLaughlin's paper entitled "Really reading Calvino in English translation?" (2010), and it is an attempt of a natural progression from his work, at least for what concerns *Invisible Cities*. As McLaughlin stated in his paper: "The overall effect of Weaver's omissions and misinterpretations in *Le*

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città invisibili is to falsify the original [...]: his translation does not convey with precision ('esattezza') certain key concepts in the text [...]." (McLaughlin 2010: 216) The present paper aims to continue on this path, also looking at the translation process from a semiotic perspective.

2. *Invisible Cities*: travelling through the construction of meanings

In *Hermit in Paris*, a posthumous volume of autobiographical writings, Italo Calvino claims:

> Travel books are a useful, modest and yet self-contained way of writing literature. These are books that have a practical use, even though, or precisely because, countries change from year to year and in fixing them as you have seen them you record their changing essence; and in such books you can express something that goes beyond the description of places one has seen, a relationship between yourself and reality, a process of knowledge (Calvino 2003: 125).

It is evident that in this statement Calvino talks about real travels, and yet his idea could easily be applied to his *Invisible Cities*: the never-ending change of places (no matter whether we are talking about countries or cities) pushes Calvino towards the writing of a novel in which —since the places described are a figment of his imagination— the observations and the thoughts expressed in the book set themselves as universal. As a consequence, those considerations will be applicable to any travel destination and will also reveal themselves effective for building that relationship —so important to Calvino— between the individual and reality, thus being a part of the process of knowledge that Calvino was referring to.

In Calvino's literary production the city is a *leit motiv*, and that is not surprising, if nothing else, because he lived in several different cities and had the chance to take a close look at them, compare them and their dynamics, while supported by his all-embracing profound knowledge and critical thinking. Moreover, as Martin McLaughlin points out, "nell'opera calviniana esistono numerosi ambiti in qualche modo connessi al tema della città" ["in Calvino's works many subject matters are somehow connected to the topic of the city"] (Barenghi, Canova et al. 2002: 42); and it could be said that throughout his entire literary production, the cities he encountered or imagined are described in such a way that turn them into a sort of unit of measurement of social and human change, both in terms of structural changes (i.e. city planning, architecture, visual arts, etc.), and inner changes (i.e. human behaviors, social attitudes, human interactions, access to and use of culture, etc.). In this sense, Calvino's *Invisible Cities* can be read as a novel belonging to travel literature, where the journey takes place in the reader's mind, evoking the landscapes of several cities that often turn out to be ascribable and comparable to one's idea of a city, an idea developed through metaphors and other figures of speech.

3. *Invisible Cities*: an open text

In his lecture given to the students of the Graduate Writing Division at Columbia University on March 29th, 1983, Italo Calvino claimed: "A city is a combination of many things: memory, desires, signs of a language; it is a place of exchange, as any text-book of economic history will tell you —only, these exchanges are not just trade in goods, they also involve words, desires, and memories" (2004: 181).

The city is the fusion of order and chaos; it is a place suspended between crystal and flame (those elements evoking an image which meant a lot to Calvino who borrowed the metaphor from Chomsky's innatism and Piaget's empiricism), a place where their alternate occurrence makes it a symbol "which has given me greater possibilities of expressing the tension between geometric rationality and the entanglements of human lives" (Calvino 1993: 71). And the author continues: "The book in which I think I managed to say most remains *Invisible Cities*, because I was able to concentrate all my reflections, experiments, and conjectures on a single symbol" (1993: 71). As a natural consequence of this statement, one possibly feels free, after reading it, to give a congruous number of interpretations of the book. Nonetheless, the conclusive words of his lecture echo Roland Barthes's "death of the author" (1977) according to which the author turns into a *scripteur,* that is someone who writes in an intransitive mode and whose concern is nothing but the activity of writing itself: "Here it becomes clear that the author's view no longer counts: it is as if the book, as I have explained, wrote itself, and it is only the text as it stands which can authorize or rule out this or that reading of it" (Calvino 2004: 182). In Wolfgang Iser's terms, the text provides "the chance to formulate the unformulated" (1980: 307). The text, however, does not have to arrive at what Umberto Eco defines as an "unlimited semiosis" (Eco 1979), referring to Pierce's theory according to which "the signified is endlessly commutable, functioning in its turn as a signifier for a further signified" (Chandler 2002: 246).

Umberto Eco would have very likely defined Calvino's *Invisible Cities* as an open text, that is a text containing in embryo different interpretations. Nonetheless, it can't be ignored that this being "open" is the result of the "empiric" author's generative textual strategy addressed to his "model" reader and at the same time, it is also the result of an interpretive strategy adopted by the empiric reader whose aim is to identify the "model" author in the text. We are therefore assuming that the sender and the receiver are not the focus of enunciation, but they are rather "actantial" roles" in enunciation, defining themselves mutually through the text. As a consequence, the text rises up as the most significant element: its *intentio operis* (i.e., what a work has to communicate on the level of signification, expressing

it through its intrinsic textual coherence —Eco 1990), the text's interpretation in semiotic terms, is what should be explored in the interpretive process carried out by the reader through his/her competences, and a cooperation with the "lazy text machinery" (Eco 2016).

The theoretical framework described will be the starting point to demonstrate that even in an apparently good translation (which is, of course, an interpretation that occurs between texts, not language systems) such as the one that William Weaver carried out of Calvino's *Le città invisibili*, it is likely to encounter deviations from the *intentio operis*.

4. Translation and interpretive issues

"*Invisible Cities* does not deal with recognizable cities. These cities are all inventions, and all bear women's names. The book is made up of a number of short chapters, each of which is intended to give rise to a reflection which holds good for all cities or for the city in general" (Calvino 2004: 177). This is how Calvino began his lecture at Columbia University in 1983.

What could be assumed by this statement? Surely, Calvino wants to make the reader reflect upon all the cities or the city in general but at the same time, he names each city, so as to create a bond of identity for every single city he describes, making the reader able to build up in his mind a frame of models easily recognizable and referential. This consideration raises a couple of questions: what happens in an Italian reader's mind when he first reads the title *Le città invisibili*?" Does the title play a role in addressing the reader toward a particular mental and critical attitude? As Umberto Eco claimed, "un titolo è […] già una chiave interpretativa" [a title (…) is already an interpretive key] (Eco 1990: 507) and, according to Genette (1989), its function is not only that of identification, but also that of description in terms of a content's structure or —as in the case of *Invisible Cities—* topic. Certainly, Weaver's choice of omitting the definite article in his translation (*Invisible Cities*) cannot be ignored and leads to some considerations.

Making use of the set theory, two hypotheses can be formulated in relation to the interpretation of the original Italian title:

1) The reader expects to learn about the specific invisible cities described in the book (Picture 1).
2) The reader expects to learn about the reason why all the cities can be classified as invisible (Picture 3).

The first hypothesis can be explained as it follows: in the original title, the definite article "le" (the) leads the reader to create the set "cities", extracting from this latter a subset —the invisible cities—, and finally extracting from this another subset where the single cities can be found.

The English and Italian languages share the same function of the definite article, so the question is: why did Weaver decide not to use it in his translation? What does the title *Invisible Cities* suggest to an English reader?

1) In the set "cities", only some of the cities are invisible, but the reader doesn't expect them to be listed (Picture 2).
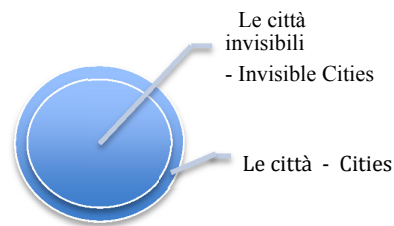2) All the cities, as such, are invisible (Picture 3).

The following scheme visually sums up the Italian and English readers' possible expectations:

Picture 1. "Diomira, Isidora, Dorotea…" ⊂ "Le città invisibili" ⊂ "Città"
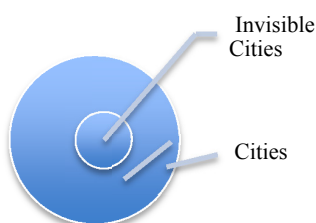
Picture 2. "Invisible Cities"…" ⊂ "Cities

Picture 3. "Le città invisibili / Invisible Cities" ⊆ "Le città / Cities"

As can be seen, in number 2, the statements, both in Italian and English, coincide. Then, Weaver's interpretation did not take into account the fact that a list of specific cities was to be found in the book.

Was his decision intentional? It can reasonably be assumed that it was intentional, as the title of each chapter representing a subcategory in the book brings about exactly the same issue (i.e.: Le città e la memoria, Cities and Memory). But there's more evidence to prove this hypothesis: in two of the 11 subcategories represented —Cities and the Dead, Cities and the Sky (in Italian, Le città e i morti, Le città e il cielo)— the article is required, otherwise the enunciation would be incorrect. It could reasonably be inferred that Weaver considered the issue, and yet decided not to specifically define with the definite article the words used in the other subcategories' titles. In the subgroup "Le città e il nome", translated as "Cities and Names", for instance, Weaver changed the noun "nome" from singular to plural. Each of the five cities described in this subcategory has in common with the others the fact that it is strongly connected to its own name, in a univocal correspondence.

Where would this lead English readers to? It can be supposed that they might assume that the same city can be called more than one name, or that there's a link between names (but whose names?) and cities, and one could go on listing hundreds of possible explanations, and of course the readers can *use* (and not *interpret*, in Eco's meaning) the text the way they like best. However, when they unveil the *intentio operis*, after applying all their competences to the text, they then realize that the context gives them the most likely interpretation; this means that the negotiation process (Eco 2013) in the translator's mind was unsuccessful. Calvino uses the definite article and the singular form, because his model readers should concentrate on the fact that, taken for granted that a city changes through time and social or historical events, its name will always identify it, no matter what.

As evidence to support this position, some excerpts are hereby reported:

- Aglaura: "(…) everything previously said of Aglaura imprisons your words and obliges you to repeat rather than to say" (Calvino 1997: 59).
- Leandra: "the real Leandra […] the Leandra that was there before all these upstarts arrived and that will remain when all have gone away" (1997: 71).
- Pyrrha: "Pyrrha had become what is Pyrrha […] obviously the name means this and could mean nothing but this" (1997: 83).
- Clarice: "Populations and customs have changed several times; the name, the site and the objects hardest to break remain" (1997: 97).
- Finally, Marco Polo speaks about Irene, but he actually has not discovered it yet; he has only heard of it, and he says the following: "Irene is a name for a city in the distance, and if you approach, it changes […] Each deserves a different name; perhaps I have already spoken of Irene under other names; perhaps I have spoken only of Irene" (1997: 113).

Weaver's more than likely deliberate choice not to put the definite article into the chapters' titles translation can be observed throughout the 11 subcategories of cities described in the book, and —as observed— it can be misleading for an English reader.

The focus of this analysis will now move to lexical issues. In the original version of the book, within the series of "thin cities", Calvino depicts Sophronia —a city "made up of two-half-cities" (Calvino 1997: 55)— starting with the description of the half which is arranged as an amusement park, as opposed to the traditional city (of stone, and marble and cement). Here is Calvino's original text: "In una c'è il grande ottovolante dalle ripide gobbe, la giostra con la raggiera di catene, la ruota delle gabbie girevoli, il pozzo della morte con i motociclisti a testa in giù, la cupola del circo col grappolo dei trapezi che pende in mezzo." Weaver translates it as follows: "in one there is the great roller coaster with its steep humps, the carousel with its chain spokes, the Ferris wheel of spinning cages, the death-ride with crouching motorcyclist, the big top with the clump of trapezes hanging in the middle" (55). The translation is accurate for the most part, except in the expression "death-ride" from the Italian "pozzo della morte", which is actually a "wall of death". At first sight, this imprecision might appear not to affect the sense of the whole translation, since the idea of danger is conveyed by both expressions. However, the enunciation "death-ride" does not suggest the idea that all the rides described before evoke, that is, the absence of gravity (as opposed to the gravity of the half city made of stone, marble and cement), which reminds us of the chapter title, namely, "thin cities": they are either

described as suspended in the void or projected upwards, so as to encourage a metaphysical metaphor. Moreover, in the original text, the motorcyclists are "a testa in giù", that is "upside down", whereas in Weaver's translation they are "crouching". Again, the adjective "crouching" suggests a strong connection with the ground, clinging to something safe. From Calvino's notes, we learn that the "thin cities" were inspired by the artist Fausto Melotti's sculptures, which were characterized exactly by a sense of lightness and suspension. As Barenghi points out, "notevole la lista di oggetti melottiani stilata sul lato destro del foglio […] per la prefigurazione di quella che a. posteriori Calvino stesso qualificherà come zona appunto "melottiana", delle città invisibili, la serie di città […] composta di immagini di sospensione e leggerezza" [The list of Melottian objects on the right-hand side of the sheet is remarkable (…) for the prefiguration of what Calvino himself would later describe as the *Invisible Cities'* "Melottian" area, the series of cities characterized by images of suspension and lightness"] (2007: 263).

Further on in the same chapter (viz, Thin Cities 4), more translation issues can be found. The original text in *Le città invisibili* reads as follows: "[…] quando il tempo della sua sosta è finito la schiodano, la smontano e la portano via, per trapiantarla nei terreni vaghi d'un'altra mezza città" (1993a: 63).

And here is the English version: "[…] when the period of its sojourn is over, they uproot it, dismantle it, and take it off, transplanting it to the vacant lots of another half city" (1997: 55).

Calvino uses the expression "terreni vaghi" to indicate the area of land where the half Sophronia will be moved, and Weaver translates it with "vacant lots". Italian has the identical expression "lotti vacanti", but Calvino did not use it. Of course, the reasons of his choice are not disclosed to the reader, but it could be assumed that "lotti vacanti" stylistically clashes with the rest of the text; moreover, "lotti vacanti" can involve the real estate market, which is something that is not openly considered in the text. Additionally, the expression" terreno vago" can be found further on in the book, in a dialogue between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, during which the Venetian merchant says: "Forse del mondo è rimasto un terreno vago ricoperto da immondezzai […]" (1993a: 104).

Weaver renders this sentence as follows: "Perhaps all that is left of the world is a wasteland covered with rubbish heaps […]" (1997: 94). Clearly, the word "wasteland" evokes T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922), and perhaps Weaver chose it on purpose to foster a possible literary connection between the two works. After all, as Beno Weiss claims in his *Understanding Italo Calvino*, "Clearly there are certain similarities between Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and T. S. Eliot's poem insofar as both authors express the disillusionment of their respective generations. The poem likewise reflects the decay, emptiness, gloom, sterility of modern life, and particularly the tedium of living in modern cities" (1993: 156).

In any case, the criticism directed at Weaver on this specific piece of translation concerns the fact that, in the original text, Calvino did not use the equivalent of "wasteland", that is "terra desolata", instead he made use of a locution that previously appeared in the text. Of course, it is impossible to know whether he did this intentionally or not, but the idea conveyed by the expression "terreno vago" is that of a bare inert region, that is why "empty land" would probably be a more appropriate and, above all, less ambiguous, translation.

Among the "thin cities", Armilla is characterised by an irregular vertical development: "Fatto sta che non ha muri, né soffitti, né pavimenti: non ha nulla che la faccia sembrare una città, eccetto le tubature dell'acqua, che salgono verticali dove dovrebbero esserci le case e si diramano dove dovrebbero esserci i piani" (Calvino 1993a: 49). In Weaver's words: "The fact remains that it has no walls, no ceilings, no floors: it has nothing that makes it seem a city, except the water pipes that rise vertically where the houses should be and spread out horizontally where the floors should be" (Calvino 1997: 42).

Visualizing Weaver's description, the reader is likely to imagine horizontal floors made out of water pipes, but the verb "diramano" used by Calvino is reminiscent of a tree pattern, in which the branches end up forming a "foresta di tubi", "a forest of pipes", as Weaver himself writes in the next sentence, an image that is immediately evoked by the expression "the water pipes (…) branch out where the floors should be". The Italian description proceeds as follows: "Contro il cielo biancheggia qualche lavabo o vasca da bagno o altra maiolica […]" (49); whereas the English version reads: "Against the sky a lavabo's white stands out, or a bathtub, or some other porcelain" (42).

The suggestion of the alternate translation "Against the sky, white flashes of a few lavabos, or a bathtub or some other majolica" could highlight the idea of a sky speckled with white spots, which is lost in the English translation, as "white" is directly associated only with the *lavabo*. The overall view acquires more vividness, above all when harmonized with the minute young nymphs settled in Armilla: they are "snelle, non alte di statura, che si crogiolano nelle vasche da bagno […], che fanno abluzioni" (49), in English "slender, not tall of stature, luxuriating in the […], washing" (42). Actually, they are not simply "washing", but they are "making ablutions", an expression which emphasizes the ritual nature of a ceremony carried out by these godly "donnine" (50), as Calvino defines them referring to their low height, and not worldly "maidens" (43), as in Weaver's version.

Some other lexical and syntactical misunderstandings or inaccuracies which, as McLaughlin points out, do "not do justice to one of Calvino's favourite values in literature, exactitude" and fail "to do justice to the nuances of the original" (2010: 213), will be listed in the two tables below. In the first one, the lexis concerning isolated single words or expressions will be considered; the second one will focus on syntactic issues. In both cases, some context will be provided when advisable. In both tables, the parts in italics refer to the main issues and are the ones for which a different translation is proposed. Of course, it is to be considered that changing one part might have affected the translation of the rest of the sentence.

Table 1. Lexical inaccuracies

Le Città Invisibili (Reference Page)	*Invisible Cities* (Reference Page)	SOURCE TEXT	WEAVER'S TRANSLATION	SUGGESTED VARIATION
9	8	*Ragazze da marito*	*Nubile* girls	*Girls of marriageable age*
12	10	*Origano*	*Marjoram*	*Oregano*
14	12	I volumi di Averroè *sapienza*	The volumes of Averroe, *learning*	*wisdom*
15	13	*Fuori dal comune*	*Unusual*	*Extraordinary*
15	13	Pur non *mostrando*in esse *bellezze* […] particolari.	Though nothing in them *possesses* a special beauty	Though nothing in them *exhibits* special beauty
15	13	*Gobbe*	*Withers*	*Humps*
22	19	Marco *s'impratichì* della lingua tartara…	Marco *mastered* the Tartar language…	Marco *familiarized himself with* the Tartar language…
29	26	Fabbrica di *esplosivi*	*Munitions* factory	*Explosives* factory
34	30	Con molti *ballatoi* e balconi	with many *platforms* and balconies	with many *galleries* and balconies
34	30	*Lenze*	*Fishing poles*	*Fishing lines*
39	32	*Affatto* ignaro delle lingue…	*Quite* ignorant of the languages	*Entirely* ignorant of the languages
59	51	Polo sapeva *secondare* l'umore nero del sovrano	Polo knew *it was best to fall in with* the sovereign's dark mood	Polo knew *how to humour* he sovereign's dark mood
66	58	Se *ci* cammini *col mento sul petto*	If you walk along *hanging your head*	If you walk along *there with chin on chest*
81	73	…la matassa pare ingabugliarsi di più	*…the plot seems to thicken* more and more	*the yarn seems to become* more and more *entangled*

Table 2. Syntactic misunderstandings

Le Città Invisibili (Reference Page)	*Invisible Cities* (Reference Page)	SOURCE TEXT	WEAVER'S TRANSLATION	SUGGESTED VARIATION
26	24	Arrivando a ogni nuova città il viaggiatore ritrova un suo passato che non sapeva più d'avere	Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that *he did not know he had*	Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that *he no longer knew he had*
31	28	[…] la contempla [la città] immaginando di specchiarsi nella peschiera delle meduse […]*di percorrere dall'alto del baldacchino il viale riservato agli elefanti (ora banditi dalla città), di scivolare* lungo la spirale del minareto a chiocciola	[…] contemplates it, [the city] imagining *his reflection* in the medusa pond […] *the view from the high canopied box along the avenue reserved for elephants (now banished from the city), the fun of sliding down* the spiral, twisting minaret	[…] contemplates it, [the city] imagining *of looking at himself* in the medusa pond, *of following the avenue dedicated to elephants (now banished from the city) from the top of the high canopied box, of sliding down* the spiral, twisting minaret
13	11	[…] *non riuscendo a distinguere i punti delle città, anche i punti che egli tiene distinti nella mente si mescolano.*	[…] *he is unable to distinguish the features of the city, the features he keeps distinct in his mind also mingle*	[…] *since he is unable to distinguish the places of the city, even the places he keeps distinct in his mind mingle*
33	29	*I primi arrivati…*	*The first to arrive…*	*Those who had first arrived…*
87	77	"No, sire, —rispose Marco—, mai *avrei* immaginato che potesse esistere una città simile a questa."	"No, sire," Marco answered*, "I should* never have imagined a city like this could exist."	"No, sire," Marco answered*, "I would* never have imagined a city like this could exist."
92	82	Milioni d'occhi s'alzano su finestre ponti capperi ed è come se scorressero su una pagina bianca	Millions of eyes look up at windows, bridges, capers, *they might be* scanning a blank page	Millions of eyes look up at windows, bridges, capers, *as if they were* scanning a blank page

The examples in the tables are not exhaustive, but —together with Mclaughlin's observations (2010)— they could give the reader some indications in the interpretive process of the text, in making more visible the invisible things. As Calvino himself stated "The word connects the visible trace with the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a frail emergency bridge flung over an abyss" (1993b: 77). This is how Calvino describes his relationship with language, and this is the main driving force of this paper. If this

is an essential truth for Calvino the writer, it then reveals itself as even more fitting and binding for the second writer, the translator. The bridge Calvino mentions, though, is not exclusively made out of single words, but it is kept together by an accurate style which acts as a binding force between the unwritten and the written world. Calvino's stylistic ideal, as he himself claimed, is that of "il mio ideale stilistico è più di leggerezza, di rapidità sintetica dell'espressione, piuttosto che di grumi verbali" [lightness, of concise quickness of expression, rather than [that of] of verbal clumps] (2012: 420). Moreover, he aims and strives for "a language as precise as possible both in choice of words and in expression of the subtleties of thought and imagination" (1993b: 56). This is Calvino's stylistic hallmark, something that a translator should not ignore. It is not infrequent for Weaver to overlook certain stylistic details of the text, and this fact stands out even more when an expression occurs more than once or twice in a literary composition, thus becoming a sort of identification tag of the text itself. The examples summed up in the table below, will back up this assertion.

Table 3. Stylistic issues

	Le Città Invisibili (Reference Page)	*Invisible Cities* (Reference Page)	**SOURCE TEXT**	**WEAVER'S TRANSLATION**	**SUGGESTED VARIATION**
a	12	10	(…) e credi di godere per tutta Anastasia mentre non ne sei che lo schiavo."	(…) you are enjoying Anastasia wholly *when you are only its slave*.	(…) you are enjoying Anastasia wholly *when you are nothing but its slave*
b	14	12	(…) e mentre credi di visitare Tamara non fai che registrare i nomi…	(…) and while you believe you are visiting Tamara *you are only recording* the names…	(…) and while you believe you are visiting Tamara *you do nothing other than register* the names…
c	39	32	Marco Polo *non poteva* esprimersi *altrimenti che* estraendo oggetti dalle sue valigie*"*	Marco Polo *could* express himself *only by* drawing objects from his baggage	Marco Polo *couldn't* express himself *other than by drawing objects from his baggage*
d	47	40	*Non mi restava che* interrogare i filosofi.	*I could only question* the philosophers	*I could do nothing but* question the philosophers
e	138	124	(…) le mucche che brucano prati salati dalle maree *non può non ricordare* il Monte San Michele	(…) and cows grazing in meadows salted by the tides c*an only* suggest Mont-Saint-Michel	(…) and cows grazing in meadows salted by the tides *can suggest nothing other than* Mont-Saint-Michel
f	138	124	(…) *e non può essere che* Urbino un palazzo che anziché sorgere entro le mura d'una città contiene una città tra le sue mura."	(…) a palace that instead of rising within a city's walls contains within its own walls a city can *only be Urbino*.	(…) a palace that instead of rising within a city's walls contains within its own walls a city can *be nothing but* Urbino.
g	163	147	"Tutto è inutile, se l'ultimo approdo *non può essere che* la città infernale"	"It is all useless, if the last landing place *can only be* the infernal city"	"It is all useless, if the last landing place *can be nothing but* the infernal city."

As can be observed in the examples reported in the table above, Calvino uses a syntactical structure, that is the negative form, as an intensifying device. In examples **a** and **b**, the aim is that of underlining the visitor's lack of choice, thus directing the reader's mind towards a more cynical attitude. In the English version of **a** and **b**, on the contrary, the interpretive process leads to the highlighting of the adverb "only", thus suggesting a more confident perception of the text.

The same happens with examples **c** and **d**, but with a completely reverse effect: the negative intensifier is used with a positive nuance in the original version —as if the protagonist told himself "I still have one chance left"— and a negative one in the English translation —as if the protagonist told himself "I only have one chance left"—.

In the examples **e** and **f**, the focus is on the cities' uniqueness and the intensifying negative form produces a sort of excitement when discovering their names. On the other hand, the use of the adverb "only"reduces the literary tension and the "surprise effect" is lost.

Finally, in example **g,** the negative intensifier works as an amplifier of the adjective "inutile-useless" in the first part of the sentence, thus connoting an oppressive nihilism in the emperor counterbalanced in the next sentence by Polo's sense of hope. In the more lighthearted English version, the perfect balance between the descent into the abyss vented by the Great Khan and the subsequent resurgence expressed by Polo has vanished with the use of the relaxed adverb "only".

5. Conclusions

In addition to being both engaging and fascinating, the translation analysis of *Invisible Cities* undoubtedly reveals itself as a means to research the semiotics of the text on a deeper level. William Weaver claimed: "Translating Calvino is an aural exercise as well as a verbal one. It is not a process of turning this Italian noun into that English one, but rather of pursuing a cadence, a rhythm —sometimes regular, sometimes willfully jagged— and trying to catch it, while, like a Wagner villain, it may squirm and change shape in your hands" (Weaver 2011).

According to Calvino, a translator must have:

doti di agilità, sicurezza di scelta lessicale, d'economia sintattica, senso dei vari livelli linguistici, intelligenza insomma dello stile (nel doppio aspetto del comprendere le peculiarità stilistiche dell'autore da tradurre, e del saperne proporre equivalenti italiani in una prosa che si legga *come fosse stata pensata e scritta direttamente in italiano*): le doti appunto in cui risiede il singolare genio del traduttore. [Agility skills, confidence in lexical choices, economic syntactic abilities, a sense of the various linguistic levels, in short, intelligence of style (in the double perspective of managing to understand the stylistic peculiarities of the author to be translated, and of being able to suggest Italian equivalents in a prose that should be read as if it had been conceived and written directly in Italian): the skills in which the singular genius of the translator resides] (Calvino 2002: 79).

What has come to light in the present paper is the fact that Weaver, in his translation of Invisible Cities, more than once seems to lose sight of the overall view of the text. As a reflection of an image of Eastern spirituality, one could argue that Calvino takes shape as a Zen writer who reaches his satori in the writing of the book. Weaver, on the contrary, remained imprisoned in the book, trying to free himself by looking for his illumination outside of it. In Weaver's defense, one must admit that Calvino's mind generates sophisticated structures, and it is never easy to understand the *intentio operis* of such beautiful mental constructs. Despite everything, Weaver tested himself in a challenging task, and it cannot be denied that, all in all, he achieved a satisfactory result, also considering that translation is a negotiation process which has to take into account many factors; as Umberto Eco asserted:

[…] on one side, there is the original text, with its own rights, sometimes an author who claims right over the whole process, along with the cultural framework in which the original text is born; on the other side, there is the destination text, the cultural milieu in which it is expected to be read, and even the publishing industry, which can recommend different translation criteria, according to whether the translated text is to be put in an academic context or in a popular one (Eco 2013: 12).

To conclude, it seems appropriate to quote Calvino on translation: he affirms that "tradurre è il sistema più assoluto di lettura. Bisogna leggere il testo nelle implicazioni di ogni parola. […] C'è uno scassinamento, c'è un furto con scasso in ogni vera lettura" ["Translating is the most absolute system of reading. You need to read the text in the implications of each word. There's a burglary, a breaking and entering in every true act of reading"] (Calvino 2007: 1807-1808).

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