

Comparing Two Translations of Giovanni Papini's Poem *C'è un canto dentro di me* Depending on the Translators' Experiences before and during the Translation

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Abstract

This paper is the first of three related articles that examine an Italian poem written by Giovanni Papini, an original figure in the Italian literature of the first half of the 20th century. This paper is a translation comparison study: the poem was translated into English by two independent translators whose personal backgrounds and translation experiences were significantly diverse. The research aims to see how these differences influence the outcomes. Comparing these two translations showed that a minor part of the content elements slightly, but differed according to each translator's particular mindset. However, the large majority of the content elements in this case, did not significantly differ. This finding can probably be attributed to the fact that these very translations — quite independently from the translators' background — were rather strongly determined by the source text. It is not always the case; certain literary pieces provide more, others less room for the translators. Additionally, recently, a clear tendency seems to articulate itself: the strict lines between 'good' and 'bad' translations have already vanished. Thus, the resultant translation is always determined both by the salient features of the source text and by the individual reading of the source text. Therefore, more individual readings of a piece offer the reader or analyzer a broader and more profound understanding of its content. This article aims to demonstrate these opposing influences via a particular translation case study in more detail, hoping it will contribute to our deeper translation theoretical understanding.

Keywords: Papini, Translation Theory, Translators' Experiences, Reading Log, Literature and Psychology, Psychosynthesis

1. Introduction

In this paper, the influence of relevant previous knowledge, personal attitudes and subjective feelings experienced by the co-authors – as translators – before and during the translation process on the content of the translations are studied. The significance of this approach is that it might contribute to our understanding of how the source text and the translator's characteristics mutually determine the results.

In this paper, we accepted the indeterminist view of deconstructionism as a “quasi translation theory” and thus believed that all translation also involves some kind of transformation. In this study, however, deconstructionism is only the general view in

the background; no formal deconstructionist methods are applied. Contrarily, it has to be mentioned that in the second paper – as indicated in Figure 1– detailed legal deconstructionist analyses are carried out.

2. About the Poet and the Poem

Giovanni Papini (1881–1956) was a self-educated Florentine journalist, writer, poet, novelist, and polemical critic. He became famous for his iconoclastic, rebellious and critical attitude towards the generally accepted life standards and religious traditions of his time. He founded the literary magazine *Leonardo* and soon became the leader of young Florentine intellectuals. Later he launched *Lacerba*, another magazine with Ardengo Soffici. They became enthusiastic adherents of Futurism and collaborated with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s Milanese group, but soon broke with them for various reasons. In 1913 he published *Un uomo finito*¹ (Papini, 1913), the expressive story of his inner psychological struggles generally considered his most valuable work. We strongly feel that what is expressed in the prosaic *Un uomo finito* is also concentrated in the piece of poetry *C’è un canto dentro di me*, first published in 1915². This is the reason why we have chosen this poem to translate.

3. The Process of Translation and Comparing the Results

This article explores how two translators (who are the co-authors of this article) experienced translating Papini’s poem *C’è un canto dentro di me* (Papini, 1932, pp. 273-276). It discusses their previous knowledge of Papini and his work, each translator’s attitude, and subjective feelings about the translation task and the poem itself. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the translation process by considering and comparing the two translators’ personal backgrounds and their experiences during the translation of a particular literary work. As stated by Martha Collins: “Multiple translations can give us a much better sense of the poem than a single translation can, so that even if we can’t read the poem in the original language, we can come closer to that experience” (Collins, 2017). Comparative studies on parallel translations of the same literary pieces have appeared in the previous decade, claiming more attention. The practical use of these studies has often occurred, for example, when the winner of a translation competition has been announced; but more recently, parallel translations have also been approached from a theoretical point of view (Collins & Prufer, 2017; Anas, 2021). The strict lines between a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ translation have vanished. Instead of imposing distinctive objectivity to translating, a subtler subjectivity occurs. In this article, both translators first describe their relevant background and knowledge of the Italian and English languages, Italian literature, and their understanding of the life and art of Papini.

The translation process started with both translators’ multiple, thorough readings of the poem, each acting independently. Before initiating this process, the translators agreed to record their attitudes, motivations, perceptions, and feelings in a personal reading log while reading the poem. These recordings were an adapted version of the so-called diary study, which is a research method in applied psychology that is used to collect subjective qualitative data about behaviors, activities, and experiences of people acting in a specific situation over time (Iida, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger, 2012). The pieces of information recorded in these diaries appear as each translator’s qualitative descriptions in Sections 4 and 5.

Similarly, to the practice of experimental sciences, the two co-authors are considered two elements of a tiny “translator sample,” and the content and quality of their products (the English translations) – and later in the second and third papers. Also, the results of the two kinds of literary analyses – are compared in three meaningful ways, as indicated in Figure 1.

As seen in this figure, the English translations themselves are compared in this (first) paper. In the second paper, formal deconstructionist analyses are conducted by both co-authors, and their results are compared. Similarly, in the third paper, an attempt is made — by the first co-author— to formulate and conduct a psychosynthetic analysis and to compare its results with the results of the deconstructionist study.

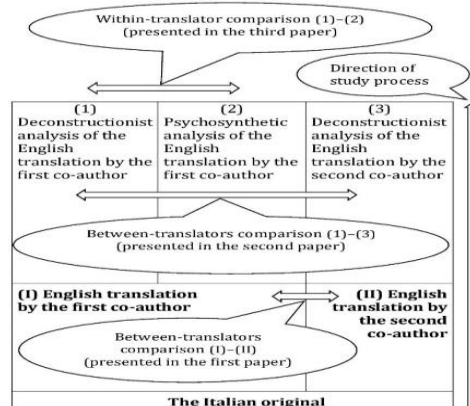


Figure 1. Experiment Design relating the three subsequent papers

The first two levels from the bottom in Figure 1 represent ready closed texts (the Italian original and its translations (I) and (II)). At the same time, the three analyses – (1), (2), and (3) – at the top-level correspond to relatively flexible interpretations.

Since the focus was mainly on the translation process, which is based on how the translator reads (and feels and understands) the poem, the original poem in Italian is not directly analysed. Indirectly, however, in essence and in reality, the original Italian text is still explored through the particular lenses of the two co-authors as translators and the results of the applied analysis methods.

4. First Translator's/Co-author's Experience

4.1. Personal Background

The first translator is a native Hungarian speaker who has earned her high school diploma in the U.S.A., and is fluent in English. She later earned two master's degrees in Hungary: one in Italian language and literature and another in mathematics. She is now a high school teacher and a university lecturer in the Italian Language. As a Ph.D. candidate in Literary Studies, she has thoroughly studied the works and life of Papini and is also familiar with psychosynthesis. She has organized the international conference "Psychosynthesis and Literature" in 2021 and is one of the co-founders of the Hungarian Psychosynthetic Society. She was 39 years old when she translated Papini's poem into Hungarian and English five months later.

4.2. Translation Experience: Hearing the Song of the Silvery Pipes

Since this description is the translator's testimony, it is written in the first-person singular. My first meeting with Papini's poem in the fall of 2017 was one of those few occasions in life that one never forgets. There was that 'wow' feeling, not just superficially, but also deep inside. Goethe's words came into my mind "Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil (Shudder is mankind's best part)" as I shuddered from head to toe. At that time, I did not realize that I would be captivated by Papini for years, during which I discovered not only this great Italian writer, but, perhaps more importantly, myself. Still, I could not understand what the poem was about. The only understanding I could be sure of is that Papini was more than he appeared, more than a crazy, rebellious man with a strange (or even evil) face and "Medusa"³ hair who later converted to a devout Christian. I had to discover something about his story— not the simple level but the one underneath his extraordinary human vesture,⁴ in his soul, in his mind, in the conscious and unconscious regions of his psyche. He was to me like a raw, strange man in a checked flannel shirt who scares my family and friends, but who, in my personal opinion, is a real treasure, only has to be known. And so we entered a relationship.

I then discussed Papini's poem with my professors and fellow Ph.D. candidates, and found their opinions to be quite diverse, but yet easily categorized into the following two polarities:

- 1) they were touched deeply but could not articulate their feelings or
- 2) they showed minimal to no interest. In the end, I was obliged to continue my research, and the poem was left aside.

A year later, upon reading Saint Augustine, Dante, and Roberto Assagioli, I remembered Papini's poem, and I had a feeling that it spoke about the same deep spiritual experience that the other three sensed, felt, and lived — a kind of spiritual experience that was ambivalently frightening and attractive. This experience could be the same phenomenon that Jung calls *numinosum*. *Numinosum* and the related words *numinous* and *numinosity* were initially coined by Otto (1958) to signify the 'holy,' but without the 'moral factor' — to which Jung provided the following definition: "[numinosum is] a dynamic agency or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will [...] The *numinosum* — whatever its cause may be — is an experience of the subject independent of his will ... The *numinosum* is either a quality belonging to a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness" (Jung, 1969, pp. 7-8). *Numinosum* and its related words were used repeatedly by Jung (Jung, 1960, pp. 103-104; Jung, 1970, pp. 458-459). Also referred to as *peak experiences* by Maslow (1964), Assagioli identifies such experiences as becoming aware of superconscious contents (Assagioli, 2000, p. 34). Why is this numinous experience so strange and frightening if it is yearned for, so much wanted and desired by our most profound essence? It is a love that burns the seeker into ashes. What Papini describes seems to be a contradiction, but, as I later discovered, can be transcendent. The process of this transcendence is part of Jung's individuation and Assagioli's spiritual psychosynthesis. According to oriental spiritual tradition (e.g., Lu Dongbin: *The Secret of the Golden Flower*) and Christian mysticism (e.g., Saint Augustine: *Confessions*), the dissolution of this ambivalence represents the most challenging passage in our spiritual journey.

In this poem, Papini, among many others, talks about the effect of heavenly music played on "silvered organ pipes". While writing my book in early 2019, I found an interesting short story by Papini, *La Santissima Annunziata* (Papini, 1958, pp. 101-105), that describes his personal experience provoked by the organs of the Santissima Annunziata church in Florence. Papini tells how, after hearing the organ music, he suddenly kneels, bows his head, and prays together with the old ladies around him. He asks himself: "Why is this happening to me? I'm not governing my acts anymore." Then, feeling dizzy and disturbed, he rushes out of the church. But after roaming about the city without understanding his particular mental state, he recognizes that he feels more substantial. This event in his youth was so profoundly felt, and decisive that Papini dictated this experience when he was near death. And all of his physical functions had deteriorated even while his intellect was perfectly intact. I went to visit this rich baroque church several times and observed those very silvered pipes, imagining Papini hearing the organ pipes and fleeing from the church.

Later I recalled Piero Ferrucci's description of Dante's *Divine Comedy* from a musical point of view (Ferrucci, 2021, pp. 142-145). Ferrucci states that the music in Purgatory, which helps Dante transform and purify his soul in preparation for his

entry into Paradise, is monophonic music consisting of canticles and psalms. Like Dante's soul, also Papini's was deeply touched by the monophonic psalms of the silvered organ pipes in Santissima Annunziata Church, thus fulfilling their holy mission of promoting his spiritual growth.

Returning to Papini's and my journey together, I soon felt compelled to translate his poem into Hungarian to make it available to my compatriots. In April 2019, I finally transformed my intention into action. I wanted to say so much; I wanted to clarify to everyone that this poem is about the encounter with the Jungian *Selbst*, a phase that one must pass through before stepping higher along their spiritual spiral.

In addition, there was a vast difference between the general tone and vocabulary I have always imagined for a poem with high artistic value and the actual tone and language that appeared in the poem. With very few exceptions, Papini's tongue seems simple, everyday speech. While it repeats words and parts of sentences that most poets avoid (e.g., the repetition of "There is a song"; "If this song were written down by my hand my hand would never be able to write down any other word," etc.), the poem's language is rude, intense and sometimes aggressive. My perception was that I should use simple, everyday words, and not 'highbrow' phrases. I also had the feeling that, in this case, the fidelity of translation is much more important than its beauty. I knew that the seemingly rough poem hides something precious: under its raw outlook, there was something magical, pure light and a hidden energy that can shine all at once through the surface.

While working on the English translation, I visited a Hungarian writer, poet, and Jungian creativity researcher, József András Fehér, to ask him about the poem. He read it, remained silent for a while with his eyes closed, and said just one thing: "It is about the *Selbst*." That was enough for me.

What helped me to translate and analyze this "frightening" and "marvellous" song is that I had the chance to feel some parts of it. I had my own spiritual experiences, and when they happened, I realized that they were similar to Papini's experiences.

5. Second Translator/Co-author's Experience

5.1. Personal Background

The second author is a native English speaker with a master's degree in Psychosynthesis Psychology and has written numerous scientific studies on psychosynthesis (Lombard, 2014; Lombard, 2016; Lombard, 2017). She is a published professional writer, psychosynthesis counselor, and researcher who lives in Italy and speaks Italian as a second language. Before this study, she nominally knew of Papini and his writings. She was sixty-four years old when she translated the poem.

5.2. The Translation Experience: Listening to the song that is never sung

Since this description of the translator's experience is her personal testimony, it is also written in the first-person singular. While unfamiliar with Papini's prose or poetry, I was familiar with his letters to Roberto Assagioli and Giovanni Prezzolini when the three of them collaborated on the publication of the magazines *Leonardo* and *La Voce* the years 1904–1909 (Giovetti, 1995). Regarding Papini's life, I had a general idea of his numerous love affairs as well as his transformations over the years, from being a futurist to a fascist and his ultimate conversion to Roman Catholicism. Papini and Assagioli parted ways in 1907 (Del Guercio Scotti & Berti, 1998). Still, recently through the work of Tóth-Izsó (2019), I came to understand the significant influence Assagioli's concepts of the psyche might have had on Papini's life and work.

And then there is that hair! Upon seeing his photos from 100 years ago, what woman could resist running her fingers through his hair, even from a distance of time and space? Despite having a reputation for being the ugliest man in Italy when he wrote *C'è un canto dentro di me*, his face is irresistibly powerful and provocative. About his appearance, Papini wrote, "Ugliness makes for timidity in the affairs of the heart, and timidity wreaks its vengeance when it turns itself into intellectual aggressivity" (Ridolfi, 1996, p. 59.; trans. second co-author). Papini's interplay between his timidity and its consequential aggressivity is just one of the many binary opposites in this poem.

I would like first to preface my experience of translating Papini's poem by stating that my translation is not a substitute for Papini's poetry but rather an "*interpretation*"⁵ of the original to those unacquainted or only slightly acquainted with the Italian language" (Bickersteth, 1913, p. viii). For there is much truth to heed in Dante's warning: "nothing harmonized according to the rules of poetry can be translated from its native tongue into another without destroying all its sweetness and harmony."⁶

Consequently, every translator of poetry faces innumerable decisions — on style (free or literal?), syntax (fluid or bumpy?), and rhyme or not to rhyme. I did my best to compromise, staying somewhere in the middle. Perhaps this decision to compromise came out of the poem's essence, as Papini writes about his fear of the song ever leaving his heart, of bolting it shut behind a prison door. At the same time, he acknowledges the song as a song of love, a marvelous song full of "infinite, heart-rending, sorrowful sweetness." He seems to walk on the flinty edge between two worlds, one where love "burns all that it touches" and another where love is an "ablaze with flaming passion" that would transform the light of earth and moon. Consequently, I found myself balancing carefully between the sounds and syntax of his song about his song, as I carried its rhymes and rhythms into the English-speaking world.

The process of translating Papini's poem *C'è un canto dentro di me* occurred over six weeks, with many pauses, questions, and doubts. It felt as if I was slowly sliding up alongside Papini but never close enough to reach out and touch his tawny-colored curls. The final poem went through five drafts, and I often wanted to pick up the phone and call him. I longed to ask him exactly how strong an inflection he wanted for words like "*ringhiotto*," "*bramosia*," "*straziante*." The word *ringhiotto* was harsh as the Italian language is as rich as it is nuanced. This one word is saying: "I have that burning, sour taste in the back of my throat as if something has come back up and I have re-swallowed it." The bloated and unwieldy English jerks madly about in search

for a solitary colorful word to describe all this. “Regurgitate” does its best but neglects to include the final re-swallowing. Settling simply on “re-swallow”, I hoped that it might be illicit, in part, some of Papini’s struggle to choke back his emerging song.

Then there was the image of his heart with his need to “*soffocare i suoi battiti sopraumani*,” literally, “to suffocate its superhuman heartbeats,” which in the 21st century seems to invoke the strangulation of a *Marvel* comic book character. When I asked my Italian teacher what this image gathered for her, she said, “an anxious heartbeat, one that beats too fast and too strongly.” Did the author want to suffocate his heartbeat or did he wish to urge it into silence? Besides, from a literal standpoint, how does one choke a heartbeat instead of one’s breath? It felt that Papini didn’t want to destroy the song inside him totally but was desperately searching for a way to contain it. Thus, I settled for the less violent and perhaps more mundane “stifle its throbbing beats.”

The innocuous word “*frana*,” which means “landslide,” also challenged my sensibilities. The term “landslide” seemed to fall hard and noisily upon the lily root, while “*frana*” slipped, descended, and enveloped it in mud. The metaphor of the lily root (which is discussed later in this section) also seemed to be lost under the debris of the English word “landslide”. I wavered between the more poetic image of “avalanche” but, after some time, realized this word evoked more snow than mud. Once more, a compromise was found in “mudslide” with the hope that the translation would make the poem’s final metaphorical flourish more lexically concrete. In this poem anaphora abounds. The word “*canto*” appears twenty-three times, most often as the second or third word in the first thirteen lines of the poem; “*un canto*” appears twelve times and “*questo canto*” appears nine times. The term ‘song’ sweeps us up and swings us back as we watch and wonder what choice Papini will make. To sing or not to sing? We almost hear the song’s refrain before he dares to with his repetitions. Will he listen to the song inside him of divine tenderness or the song that murders its docile victim? Or both? In addition, there is the constant refrain of “*di me*,” “*mio*” and “*mia*,” pronouns that abruptly disappear only to reappear later. They seem hinged together by the single stanza in which Papini ambiguously but unmistakably defines the song inside him by what it *isn’t*. He emphasizes all that is absent by repeating the word “without” four times in a line of only twelve words: “A song without measure and without time; without rhythm and without rules.” While we are still uncertain what the song actually *is*, the words are as clear as the music we can almost hear. This line was the easiest to translate.

Ironically, the most difficult word to translate was “*adagi*,” the only musical term in the entire poem about a song. I tried “adagios”, but it sounded off-key. Wherever I attempted to place the word, it seemed to fall flat on its face or run backward over itself. While in Italian, “*gli adagi celestriali*” nearly sounds like what it means, “heavenly adagios,” in English it sounds more like the name of a pizza special. Better to say “music,” but then was the music heavenly, celestial or divine? I chose “heavenly” as the voiceless pronunciation of the /h/ sound seemed to balance the two instances of ‘held’ on either side.

Only in the future did it happen to me to read the poem and quickly find Luigi Maria Corsanico’s performance. His deep and resonant voice gave life to Papini’s words, and finally, I could catch the rare instances of subtle rhyme (fleeting like the elusive *canto*). The final edit included changing ‘the start of sweet agony’ to ‘the start of the sweetest strife’ so that “strife” might rhyme with “life,” mirroring Papini’s “*mia vita*” and “*agonia*.” I decided — just this once — to sacrifice meaning for rhyme, knowing that the word “strife” hardly evokes the wounded suffering of “agony.”

6. Comparing the Contents of the Two Translations

In this section, the two translations are compared by their content characteristics, and then an attempt is made to interpret any differences, in terms of the translators’ backgrounds. A simplified qualitative content analysis was applied. The sentences of the original poem served as units of study, to each of which – based on the personal reading logs – it was coded if the two translators used similar or different wording in their respective translations.

Some slight but identifiable differences occurred in the translation due to the different interpretations by the two translators. For example, the first translator — who preferred fidelity to beauty — uses mainly everyday linguistic expressions like “get out” right in the first line. The Italian word “*uscire*” is, in fact a commonly used verb that indicates “to go out,” “to get out,” and “to leave.” However, the second translator chose the verb “to part (from),” which is less commonly used in everyday situations, more polished, and more suitable as a literary language. Furthermore, this choice by the second translator possibly better expresses the ‘secession’ of the song from the poet’s heart as described in the line: “There’s a song inside me that cannot part from me.”

This same mindset appears in the translation of “*omicida*.” The first translator writes “divine and killing song” and the second translator “divine and murderous song.” In this case, “murderous,” the choice of the second translator, seems to be closer to the Italian; the more straightforward, and casual “killing” is less specific. In addition, “murderous” gives a mysterious sonority that makes the poem more macabre.

There are only a few expressions where the poet leaves space for multiple interpretations from a textual point of view. One example is “*a cui non s'accostano i deboli*.” The two translators interpret this phrase differently: “the weak ones cannot even approach” (first translator) and “the weak don’t dare go near” (second translator). Their way of thinking is evident in their interpretations. The first translator suggests that in order to save the lives of the weak, the poet has to look like — or become — a beast that cannot even be approached; he has to frighten them. So his becoming a beast is an intentional act. While in the case of the second translator the poet seems to be such a frightening beast that the weak do not dare to approach him. In this case, the intent is held by the “weak,” not by the “beast,” as it becomes their choice (not his) as to whether to approach him.

However, the poet does not define either intent and leaves the interpretation open. Therefore, perhaps the most faithful translation would be the more objective phrase: “to whom the weak do not go closer.”

In the case of “*la mezzanotte sarebbe più ardente del più bruciato meriggio*,” we find ourselves in front of an interesting stylistic choice when reading the second translator’s “midnight would be brighter than the brightest noon.” She concentrates on the visual experience and emphasizes the word “bright” through its repetition. This time, the first translator remains loyal to the original text by choosing words that express a sense of heat beyond brightness: “midnight would be more glaring than the most burning noon.” In this interpretation, sultry heat radiates from the searing sun, which is “*ardente*” and “*bruciato*,” both references to flames and fire.

Concerning the content elements, it can be stated that there are some minor differences clearly attributable to different perceptions and interpretations of the poem. The reason why the greater part of the content elements does not differ is that a translation — independently from the translator’s personal background — is essentially compelled to follow an inescapable path predetermined by the source text.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that in this very case a minor part of the content elements in the translations slightly differs according to the two translators’ particular mindsets. The large majority of the content elements, however, do not differ significantly between the two translations.

The resultant translation is always determined by the salient features of the source text and by the translator’s reading of the source text. However, the measure or degree of this determination generally can vary in a vast spectrum. In this particular case, for various reasons, the influence of the source text proved to be stronger.

As we are deeply convinced that the two main determining factors of a translation are the source text itself and the translator’s personality, in this paper, we accepted the deconstructionist frame tentatively as a “quasi translation theory.” It was promising that deconstruction, on the one side, offers the translator the freedom to create his or her reading of the piece. On the other side, however, even the most extreme deconstructionist translation is rooted somehow in the given source text.

At the end of this paper, we self-critically have to confess that – despite nominally accepting the deconstructionist frame – our study is still lacking a well-established theoretical framework. This way, it was not possible to satisfactorily explain our findings. This is why we carried out deeper formal deconstructionist analyses in the second paper. We hoped that we could get critical insights into the mechanisms of the translation process via these analyses. As a result, we achieved essential part-results, but it also turned out that not the deconstructionist frame is the best analytical approach to this particular poem. Therefore, in the third paper, we attempted to establish another approach that hopefully fits better with the given poem and similar literary pieces.

As to the aesthetic value of the two translations, the first translator declares that it is no question and no surprise that the second translator’s product — apart from the different personal backgrounds of the translators — represents a higher artistic quality.

Appendix: The original and the translated poems

The original poem

Giovanni Papini: *C’è un canto dentro di me*
(Cento pagine di poesia, 1915)

C’è un canto dentro di me che non potrà mai uscire dalla mia bocca - che la mia mano non saprà scrivere sopra nessun pezzo di carta.

C’è un canto dentro di me che devo ascoltare io solo — che devo soffrire e sopportare soltanto io.

C’è un canto chiuso nelle mie vene come gli adagi celestiali nelle canne argentate degli organi — c’è un canto che non fiorirà come la radice del giaggiolo sepolta sotto la frana.

C’è un canto dentro di me che resterà sempre dentro di me.

Se questo canto uscisse dal mio cuore romperebbe il mio cuore.

Se questo canto fosse scritto dalla mia mano nessun'altra parola più potrebbe scrivere la mia mano.

Questo canto non sarà detto che nell'ultima ora della mia vita; questo canto sarà il principio d'una felice agonia.

C’è un canto dentro di me che non può uscire fuori di me perché non furono ancor create le parole necessarie.

Un canto senza misura e senza tempo; senza ritmo e senza leggi.

Un canto che non può adagiarsi in nessuna forma e che spezzerebbe qualunque linguaggio.

Un canto che nessuno potrebbe ascoltare senza che la sua anima fosse sgomenta dalla sorpresa e ricolorata da un altro sole.

Un canto più respirato che detto, più presentito che manifestato: suono di luci, raggio d'accordi.

Un canto che non desidera nessuna musica perché sarebbe più melodioso d'ogni strumento conosciuto.

Dentro il mio cuore così grande che a giorni contiene l'universo questo canto è così grande che ci sta a gran fatica. Nei minuti più angosciosi della vita questo canto vorrebbe traboccare dal mio cuore troppo stretto come il pianto dagli occhi di chi piange

se stesso. Ma lo respingo e lo ringhiotto perché insieme a lui anche il sangue del mio cuore traboccherebbe con la stessa furia voluttuosa. Lo rinchiudo in me stesso perché non voglio ancora morire. Son la vittima docile di questo canto divino e omicida. Debbo serrare il cuore come la porta di una carcere e soffocare i suoi battiti soprumani come tanti rimorsi. Ed essere, con tutta la mia tenerezza, il feroce a cui non s' accostano i deboli. Perché il mio canto sarebbe uno spaventoso canto d'amore e quest'amore brucerebbe tutto quello che tocca. L'amore che riscalda soltanto è appena tiepido ma il vero amore nel medesimo soffio bacia e distrugge. Quest' amore sarebbe così splendente d'infocata bramosia che in quel giorno la terra illuminerebbe il sole e la mezzanotte sarebbe più ardente del più bruciato meriggio. Ma io non canterò mai questo terribile canto che mi consuma senza che nessuno abbia compassione del mio tormento. Non canterò questo canto meraviglioso che la mia paura rinnega e che fa tremare la mia debolezza. Non canterò questo canto perché nessuno potrebbe sostenerne l'infinita, la straziante, la dolorosa dolcezza.

The translation by the first co-author

Giovanni Papini: There is a song inside of me

There is a song inside of me that cannot get out of my mouth — that cannot be written down on any kind of paper by my hand.
 There is a song inside of me that only I have to hear — that I and only I have to suffer and bear.
 There is a song closed in my veins the same way as the heavenly adagios are closed in the silvered organ pipes— there is a song that will never bloom as the lily roots buried by landside will never bloom either.
 There is a song inside of me that will stay there forever.
 If this song got out of my heart, it would break and destroy my heart.
 If this song were written down by my hand my hand would never be able to write down any other word.
 This song will be pronounced only in the last hour of my life; this song will then be the beginning of a happy agony.
 There is a song inside of me that cannot get out of me, because the words necessary for it still have not been created.
 A song without measure and time, without rhythm and rules.
 A song that does not fit any form and would lacerate any language.
 A song that no one could hear without his soul being dismayed by the surprise and being recoloured by another sun.
 A song more breathed than pronounced, more divined than manifested: sound of lights, ray of chords.
 A song that does not need any music because it would be more harmonic than any known instrument.
 This song hardly fits in my grandiose heart, that sometimes can include the whole universe.
 In the most oppressive moments of life, this song strives to burst forth from my too narrow heart, just like the tears of a man who laments himself brim over.
 But I keep it and swallow it back because with it the blood of my heart would also burst forth, with the same voluptuous and untameable way. Accordingly, I close it in myself because still, I do not want to die.
 Thus I am an obedient victim of this divine and killing song. I have to lock my heart, like the gate of a prison, and suppress the superhuman heartbeats of this song, just like my remorse. And, despite all my weaknesses, I have to be the remorseless beast to whom the weak ones cannot even approach.
 Because my song would be the frightful song of love, and that love would burn away everything it would even touch.
 The love that only warms up is just tepid, but the real love of the same blown kisses and destroys.
 This love would be so incandescence and resplendent by an insatiable longing that on that very day, the earth would illuminate the sun, and midnight would be more glaring than the most burning noon.
 But I will never sing this terrible song that consumes me without anyone having compassion for my anguish.
 I will not sing this marvellous song that my fear denies and that makes my weakness tremble.
 I will not sing this song because no one could bear its infinite excruciating and painful sweetness.

The translation by the second co-author

Giovanni Papini: There's a song inside me

There's a song inside me that my mouth will never release — that my hand will not know how to write on any sheet of paper.
 There's a song inside me that only I should listen to — that I, and only I, must suffer and endure.
 There's a song held tightly inside my veins like the heavenly song held inside the silvery organ pipes.
 There's a song that will not bloom like the lily root buried under the mudslide.
 There's a song inside me that will stay forever inside me.
 If this song were ever to leave my heart, it would break my heart.
 If this song were written by my hand, never would another word be written by my hand.
 This song will not be proclaimed until the ultimate hours of my life; this song will be the start of the sweetest strife.
 There's a song inside me that cannot part from me, because the words I need have yet to be written.
 A song without measure and without time; without rhythm and without rules.
 A song that cannot fit into any form and that would break apart any language.
 A song that no one could listen to without their soul becoming frightened by the surprise or recoloured by another sun.

A song more exhaled than pronounced, more foreboding than revealed, sound of light, ray of chords.
 A song that craves no music because it would be too melodious for any known instrument.
 Inside my grand heart, so grand that at times it holds the universe, this song is so great that my heart is greatly fatigued. During the most distressing of life's moments, this song would burst forth from my too narrow heart like the tears that mourn for one's self.
 But I reject and re-swallow the song because my heart would burst forth with the same sensual rage. I shut it up inside me because as yet I do not want to die.
 I am the docile victim of this divine and murderous song.
 I must bolt my heart shut like a prison door and stifle its throbbing beats like so many regrets. And with all my tenderness be the savage beast whom the weak don't dare to go near.
 Because my song would be a frightening song of love and this love would burn all that it touches.
 Love that warms is only just tepid, but true love kisses and destroys with the same breath.
 This love would be ablaze with flaming passion, and on that very day, the earth would illuminate the sun, and midnight would be brighter than the brightest noon.
 But I will never sing this terrible song that consumes me without anyone having compassion for my torment.
 I will not sing this marvellous song that my fear denies and that causes my weakness to shudder.
 I will not sing this song because no one would be able to hold its infinite, heart rending, sorrowful sweetness.

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Notes

¹ English translations: Papini, Giovanni. 1924. *The Failure (Un Uomo Finito)* (V. Pope, Trans.). New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company; Papini, Giovanni. 1924. *A man finished*. (M. Prichard Agnetti, Trans.). London, England: Hodder and Stoughton.

² The poem was first published in Papini, G. (1915). *100 pagine di poesia*. Florence, Italy: Libreria della Voce, later in Papini, G. (1920). *100 pagine di poesia*. Florence, Italy: Vallecchi and in Papini, G. (1932). *Poesia in prosa. Cento pagine di Poesia. Giorni di festa*. Florence, Italy: Vallecchi.

³ Letter from Prezzolini to Papini, from Milano, 25 July 1905: "I send you photographs. Me, Vailati and Assagioli are splendid – you terrible mask, as usual, frightened and frightening romantic Medusa." Trans. first co-author. (Papini & Prezzolini, 2003, p. 405).

⁴ "Tall, lanky, with a shirt left unbuttoned on the breast, a fuzzy tuft of a colour between nut-brown and blond, unrealistically straggly on the top of a high and sallow forehead. Teeth out of the mouth and a pair of happy dragon eyes coruscating from behind the myopic glasses, he, at first sight, seems ugly to me like I was informed, and like he has always been celebrated later on by his biographers; but his ugliness that is more like a kind of beauty, a higher level of beauty, if one can say so."—Trans. first co-author. (*Papini vivo*, 1957, pp. 25-26). Originally published (Soffici, 1954).

⁵ Bickersteth's italics.

⁶ "Nulla casa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra trasmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia" Alighieri, D. *Convivio* I. vii. 14.