

# A Paratextual Analysis of *I Promessi Sposi*

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The study of paratexts (verbal and non-verbal productions that adorn, reinforce and accompany a text (Genette 1997: 1)) in translation is still in its infancy but, as shown by the little research carried out on this topic thus far, it is of considerable importance. Paratextual elements can be used to determine how the overseas reputation of an author evolved over time, simply by analyzing the cover or title page, where the work's title and author's name appear. These elements can help shed light on translation strategies, and they can also indicate whether the prestige of a work in the source culture has been conveyed in the target culture. The latter is the purpose of the present study, which adopts a paratextual standpoint to analyzing translations of the Italian novel *I Promessi Sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni that were published in England and the USA over a span of a century and a half (1845–1997). Through an analysis of what Genette (1997) calls peritexts and epitexts, this study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Do the paratextual elements in these translations successfully convey the prestige and importance that the novel had and still has in Italy? If so, how?; and 2) Did the different perceptions of Manzoni and the novel in England and the USA affect the way these translations were paratextually represented?

**Keywords:** peritext, epitext, prestige, Manzoni, translation

## 1 Introduction

This paper presents a paratextual analysis of *I Promessi Sposi*, a classical Italian novel by Alessandro Manzoni, of which there exist two original versions: one published in 1825–27, and a second definitive edition rewritten and re-edited by Manzoni himself and published in 1840 with authorial illustrations.<sup>1</sup> Both versions have been taken into account here, because some English translations are based on the first Italian edition, others on the second.<sup>2</sup> The other reason I decided to include both versions is that there are major differences in how they were paratextually presented to the Italian public. The 1827 edition was published in three volumes,

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to rewrite the novel was mainly due to Manzoni's dissatisfaction with it from a linguistic point of view. The language in the original was particularly tied to the Milanese dialect, but Manzoni wanted to make his novel more Italian, so he decided to rewrite it using the language spoken in Florence. It took him almost two decades to accomplish this goal, but in 1840 the novel was finally ready to be published (Bersezio 1873: 60).

<sup>2</sup> All the English versions until 1951 were translated from the 1827 edition, whereas from Archibald Colquhoun's 1951 translation onwards the 1840 edition was used as the source text (Garofalo 1973: 385).

each with a main theme,<sup>3</sup> and was not illustrated, whereas the 1840 edition was published as a single volume and was illustrated.

The English translations cover a span of almost one and a half century, from 1845 to 1997, and were published in England and the United States of America. The translated versions examined here amount to a total of sixteen books, published in the following years: 1845, 1878, 1883, 1886, 1889, 1899, 1900, 1906, 1908, 1909, 1914, 1924, 1959, 1965, 1968, and 1997.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this study is not only to determine whether the prestige and importance that *I Promessi Sposi* had in Italy was efficiently and masterly conveyed through the paratextual elements of the target texts, but also whether the different perceptions of the novel and of Manzoni himself by American and English critics affected the publisher's paratextual choices. Toward this end, articles and reviews published in Italy in the late 1820s and in England and the USA in the 1830s were also analyzed.

The methodological framework on which this study is based is that of microhistory, which privileges “the study of marginal individual cases in their ‘normal exceptional’ transgressions of what is commonly described as the mainstream continuity in the understanding of the past” (Adamo 2006: 82). Microhistory deals with neglected subjects and tries to fill in the blank spaces of the history, or rather histories, of translation (2006: 85). Paratexts are a neglected subject in translation studies. They constitute an alternative object of study and a different way of looking at translation. In this paper, paratextual analysis is used as a tool for investigating the extent to which the inferior or superior status of a novel and its author in a certain place at a specific time is conveyed by the paratextual elements surrounding and helping to define the novel. Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* has been chosen because, although this classic has been studied by other translation scholars, it has never been analyzed from a paratextual viewpoint. The paratextual analysis of the English and American versions will attempt to reveal hitherto-unexplored aspects of these translations.

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<sup>3</sup> Each of the three volumes has a motif: in the first, the wedding between Renzo and Lucia is cancelled, because Don Abbondio (the priest) is forbidden to conduct it by two *bravi*; in the second, Renzo goes to a Capuchin in Milan where he hopes to find refuge, while Lucia takes refuge in the convent of Monza; in the third, the author recounts the famine, the plague and finally the wedding (Tommaséo 1927: 103).

<sup>4</sup> The 1844 English version of *I Promessi Sposi* was not analyzed because it was not available for research.

## 2 Literature Review

Although the study of paratexts in translation is still in its infancy, the little research about it that does exist has shown how the analysis of what Genette (1997: 5) calls *peritexts* (paratextual elements found *within* the text) and *epitexts* (paratextual elements found *outside* the text) can bring to light previously overlooked issues. For example, paratextual elements can be used to help determine how the reputation of an author abroad evolved over time, simply by analyzing the title page or cover, where the work's title and author's name appear. A similar study has been carried out by Guyda Armstrong on the Seventeenth-century English translations of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, where, through an analysis of the title pages of five editions published in that century, she noticed that Boccaccio's reputation in England went from complete anonymity (1620 edition) to becoming, in the 1684 edition, "*that Renowned John Boccaccio*" (Armstrong 2007: 48–49).

Translators' notes (another paratextual element) can also shed light on translation strategies (Crisafulli 2004) and the translation process (Shiyi 2006). Crisafulli claims that the translator's personality emerges in the paratext, especially in critical notes. To make his point, he gives the example of H. F. Cary's English version of the *Divina Commedia* by Dante Alighieri. Despite the fluency and faithfulness of the translation, the translator still preferred to comment on the text, thus becoming visible to the reader, which implies a foreignizing strategy (2004: 457). Yu Shiyi, on the other hand, argues that the translator's interpretation of a text is inevitably affected and also constrained by the presence of authorial commentary notes in the source text, which are there to guide readers to the one 'correct' understanding of the text (2006: 34). As a result, the translation turns out to be a "*duplicated interpretation in a different language*" (2006: 29) of the source text.

Paratextual elements may also have an impact on the target audience's reception of a text as a translation (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2002). Reception depends on several factors, such as the use of foreign words, culture-bound items, and even unusual syntax (2002: 45). These are usually found inside the book, but the reader's first impression of whether a book is a translation or not is primarily conveyed by such paratextual elements as the name of the author, the name of the translator (whenever it appears), and the title of the book (2002: 45). In some cases, the presence

of the original author's name, mention of the original title, and the translator's name may be interpreted as a call to readers to think of the text as a translation (2002: 56).

Yet paratexts can also shape the text itself, and as a consequence they can have a major impact on the way a translation is carried out. Tahir-Gürçağlar mentions the case of the popular dime novels published in Turkey between 1940 and 1966 by the Translation Bureau in association with the Ministry of Education. In this case, the paragenic indication on the cover of such novels, usually adventure and detective stories, forced translators to manipulate and abridge the length of the original texts to adapt them to the sixteen-page format used in such novels (2002: 57–58).

The study of paratexts can also indicate whether the prestige a work has enjoyed in the source culture has been conveyed in the target culture, which, as previously mentioned, is the purpose of this study. In the analysis below, I focus particularly on what Genette (1997: 23) calls the publisher's peritext, since this is where it is possible to see how the publisher conceived the work in the first place and how that conception affected its production in terms of paratextual elements.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 Paratextual Analysis

#### 3.1 Critical Review: An Epitext Analysis

Before analyzing the paratextual elements, I will present an overview of how Manzoni and particularly his novel *I Promessi Sposi* were received in Italy, England and the USA in order to determine whether the different perceptions of the author and the novel itself affected the paratextual representation of the translations. One approach is to look at articles and reviews published around the time the novel appeared. Before the publication of *I Promessi Sposi*, Manzoni was already well-known and well-regarded for his poems and odes and their classical and lyrical style. Hence when his novel came out Italian critics gave it a warm reception. Among those who wrote positive reviews are Giuseppe Mazzini and Tommaséo, who both praised the work's historical and narrative nature. More particularly, in an article published in *L'Indicatore Genovese*, Mazzini praised Manzoni's brilliant mind for having written this historical romance that offered Italy its first instance of a historical novel (Mazzini 1928: 34–35). For his part,

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<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this study, the title page is of little interest, because it is difficult to infer the prestige or importance of a book simply by looking at the title page. Of more interest are prefaces, illustrations, and any other information about the series to which the book belongs or about the publisher itself.

Tommaséo praised Manzoni's writing skills and techniques. In his view, the division of the novel into three volumes was a masterly move on the part of the author (Tommaséo 1927: 102), making the novel “un romanzo il più possibile degno di lui”<sup>6</sup> (103), in which “i difetti di questo libro dimostrano un grande ingegno, le bellezze un ingegno divino”<sup>7</sup> (1927: 119). The only flaw Tommaséo pointed out concerns Manzoni's decision to use two peasants as the protagonists, because in Tommaséo's view, “[...] i montanari in Italia non si diletano di legger romanzi”<sup>8</sup> (105).

In his article “British and American translations of *I Promessi Sposi*”, Pallotta (1973) gives an overview of the different English and American reviews and critiques written in the nineteenth century. He concludes that “In America the critical response to *I Promessi Sposi* proved more balanced, perceptive and largely favorable” (490), whereas in England the criticism was initially quite negative. To make his point, Pallotta quotes the English *Foreign Quarterly Review* of 1827, in which *I Promessi Sposi* was defined as “an indifferent novel written by a highly respectable dramatist” (1827: 484).<sup>9</sup> Another overall negative assessment of the novel can be found in the *New Monthly Magazine* of 1847 where, although praised for his style and vivid description of the events and characters, Manzoni is said to know “nothing of plot and character” (1847: 485). Pallotta also quotes a passage from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1849 in which Manzoni was criticized for the supposed similarities between his novel and one by Walter Scott (1849: 485).

Some American reviews worth mentioning are by Elizabeth Ellet, Edgar Allan Poe, and G.W. Greene. Ellet begins her review by writing “It was with sincere pleasure that we hailed the arrival of this fascinating foreigner in her [the novel] American costume” (Ellet 1834: 387), and she likens Manzoni to Walter Scott, calling him “the Walter Scott of the Italian peasantry.”<sup>10</sup> Poe praised the novel for the linearity of the plot and richness of the language and recommended it to his readers:

“The machinery of the story is not intricate, but each part is necessary to the rest. To leave anything out is to tell nothing. [...] The strength of the language is in the number and variety of its

<sup>6</sup> A romance as worthy as possible of him [Manzoni] (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> The flaws of this book show a great talent, its beauties [show] a divine talent (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> Peasants in Italy do not enjoy reading novels (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> In this review, Manzoni was criticized for being overly detailed in his description of characters and events and for not managing the plot efficiently.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting here that the publisher for whom Ellet was writing this review was the one publishing the novel (Low 1986: 53).

idiomatic phrases [...] They enable the speaker to be brief, without being obscure” (Poe 1835: 521).

Unlike Poe and Ellet, G.W. Greene offered a mixed review.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning, he praises Manzoni’s skills as a novelist and historian, because Manzoni managed to describe each and every event and character meticulously. Greene also acknowledges that:

“No historian has ever painted with more truth the influence of circumstances upon character, or the vigorous vitality with which the Deity has endowed those principles, which he designed for the guide and the solace of mankind” (Greene 1840: 349).

Despite lauding the plot and narrative mechanisms, Greene is critical of the wordiness in the descriptions of some characters (the Unknown, the Monica di Monza) and historical events (the famine and plague) and of the author’s choice to abandon the classical and lyrical style in favour of the language spoken by common people (1840: 358–360). At the end of the review, Greene wonders why Manzoni refused “the aid of those graces of expression, those artifices of style, which add to the charm of the profoundest ideas, and of the strongest feeling” (1840: 361). After pointing out these flaws, however, he concludes the review with an overall positive appraisal of the work, which he defines as “one of the most beautiful productions of the age” (1840: 361).

Given the different attitudes toward the novel as highlighted in the above epitextual analysis, one would expect different paratextual representations of the translations in England and the United States, but this does not seem to be the case, as shown below.

### 3.2 Peritext Analysis

Like the 1827 original, the 1845 translation is divided into three volumes and is bound in marbled paper boards, with blue leather spine and corners and gilt top edges. The spine contains the English title *The Betrothed Lovers*, the author’s last name, and the volume number. From an aesthetic point of view, the three volumes present as part of a special, valuable collection, although these are the only elements pointing to that perception. Indeed, on opening the book, we find no preface, which might have been used to introduce the reputation of the author and the novel to readers. Together with the limited use of translator’s notes, this suggests that the 1845 edition was meant for a literary audience. The title page contains the title in English at the top, followed by the subtitle *A Milanese Story of the Seventeenth Century*, the title of the appendix,

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<sup>11</sup> Greene wrote this review in 1840, but the edition he was referring to was the 1827 one.

the author's name, the volume number, the publisher's name and location (Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, London), and the date of publication. The book was given a classical and elegant look, which, though not in words, succeeds in conveying the importance and prestige of this novel.

The 1878 edition was published by George Bell and Sons, London, and unlike the 1845 edition, it is illustrated. The illustrations are taken from the 1840 Italian version, but not all of those in the original text are included in the translation (probably because of the cost). This translation is bound in blue leather with decorations on the cover and spine. The cover contains no information whatsoever, but the spine shows the title of the novel, which is changed to *The Betrothed*, followed by the author's last name. On opening the book, the reader is presented with a seven-page colophon, in which we learn that the novel is part of the Standard Works Series, which included works by such prestigious authors as Dante, Shakespeare and Swift. In this edition, the prestige is mainly conveyed by non-textual paratextual elements such as the use of a leather binding, the presence of woodcuts,<sup>12</sup> and more importantly the fact that the novel was included in a series dedicated to classical, well-known writers. In the advertisement even the translator, whose identity is unknown, cannot find words to define the author's genius:

“What has a translator of “I Promessi Sposi” to say for himself? To praise the author would be superfluous for those who mean to read the work, and impertinent for others (V).”

The 1883 and 1886 editions are by the same publisher as the 1878 translation, but partly changed from that version. The bindings are of brown and blue cloth respectively, and they are undecorated. The seven-page colophon added to the 1878 edition is absent, but the translator's advertisement remains. In other words, out of the four elements that in the previous edition conveyed the prestige of the work, only two (the illustrations and the advertisement) are retained in these editions.

The 1889 edition has a mixed binding (the spine and the corners are covered in green leather and the rest in cloth) with no decoration, except on the spine, which shows the name of the series (*The Minerva Library of Famous Books*), the title, the author's last name, the publisher's mark, the names of the editor and publisher, and the place of publication. On the frontispiece is a portrait of the author in old age. No mention is made of whom the portrait is by or Manzoni's age at the time it was painted. Following the frontispiece is the title page which,

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<sup>12</sup> The use of woodcuts usually implies a higher price of the book. Illustrated copies are more expensive because of the different printing process involved in inserting illustrations.

besides containing the title, the author's name, the publisher's name and the date of publication, has the series designation at the very top: "THE MINERVA LIBRARY OF *FAMOUS* BOOKS. Edited by G.T. BETTANY, M.A., B.Sc." (III).

The author's own introduction is preceded by a biographical introduction by the editor that highlights Manzoni's genius and literary skills. Bettany begins by ranking Manzoni among those authors who "rest their fame upon one or two great works, which shine perhaps the more brilliantly for their comparative isolation" (V). After describing Manzoni's life and publishing career, he ends by talking about the novel, which he called a "great romance" (IX) and likened to a "great epic" (XII). The supreme status of this novel in Italy<sup>13</sup> is also confirmed by the presence, at the end of the book, of a colophon stating that "The Minerva Library of Famous Books consisting of Books of unquestionable value and popularity, printed on good paper, in good type" (457). The colophon adds that the series only includes "works of the most widespread and lasting popularity, which have proved themselves worthy of a permanent place in literature" (457). Though this information is clearly biased, being worded by the publisher itself, it nevertheless manages to convey the novel's prestige and popularity.

The 1899 edition was published by D. Appleton and Company of New York, and it has an unadorned green cloth binding. The spine carries the name of the series (The World's Great Books), the title in English, the author's last name, and the edition type (Aldine Edition). As with the 1889 edition, the spine gives readers a hint of the status of the novel, considered as one of the world's great books. What is usually the half-title page<sup>14</sup> is used to provide information about the book series. The author's full name and the novel's title are placed at the very top of the page on the right, while in the middle of the page a box contains the series name and the names of the members of the World's Great Books Series Committee of Selection. This paratextual element helps convey the high status of the novel, as does the indication at the bottom that the book is part of an Aldine Edition.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Gatta describes *I Promessi Sposi* as "il romanzo storico per eccellenza"—"the historical novel par excellence" (my translation) (2002: 29).

<sup>14</sup> According to Genette (1997), "Page 3 is reserved for the 'half title'. This page bears only the title, possibly shortened (1997: 32)."

<sup>15</sup> The edition of certain books is so called in honor of Aldus Manutius, an Italian printer who set up a printing and publishing establishment in Venice in 1490 to print critical editions of the ancient classical writers (Greek and Latin) (Dahl 1968: 119). The success of these editions was not only due to their octavo format, cursive style, good paper, and excellent workmanship, but also to the care with which they were produced in order to provide a faithful and correct version of the text (ibid. 120–121). Thus, the word "Aldine" is nowadays synonymous with excellence and classicism.

The half-title page is followed by the frontispiece, which contains a portrait of Manzoni, accompanied by a glossy paper indicating his name and the fact that the portrait is a “Photogravure from a drawing made for this work”, but no information about the painter is provided. The only noteworthy aspect of the title page is that it specifies that the novel is illustrated, which is also an indicator of high status, as mentioned earlier. What is worth pointing out here is the presence of a critical introduction by Maurice Francis Egan, preceded by a facsimile miniature taken from a manuscript of Terence.<sup>16</sup> In the critical introduction, Egan praises the author because “by his words and his example, Manzoni appealed to the best qualities of the Italian head and heart” (IV). After describing Manzoni’s writing techniques and supreme style, Egan concludes by stating that *I Promessi Sposi*:

“will always hold its own, for several reasons: ethically it is sweet and pure; artistically, it is simple and true; historically, it marked a literary epoch; it was the first important book of its kind in Italy; it has stood the test of time, therefore, it is a classic” (XIII).

Combined with the use of woodcuts inserted here and there in the translation to depict places and characters mentioned by Manzoni, these paratextual elements succeed in conveying the prestige and importance of the novel.

The 1900 translation is by the same publisher as the 1899 edition; indeed, on the whole, the book has the same features, with the exception of:

- 1) the binding, in red plastic material
- 2) the edition, which is not an Aldine but an “Édition de Gran Luxe”.

The publisher’s peritext indicates that the novel in question is “Limited to Five Hundred Sets”. Despite these variations, this edition still manages to convey the high status the novel deserves.

The 1906 edition was published by The National Alumni and has a pink leather binding, with no decoration on it. The spine contains the author’s last name and the title of the novel. There is no half-title page; in its place we find some interesting information about Italian literature, which is said to consist of “16 volumes, of which this one forms a part”<sup>17</sup>. This paratextual element gives the reader a precise idea of how important the novel is, and it corroborates my hypothesis that the paratextual elements of this book all point to the high status

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<sup>16</sup> The miniatures and pictures inserted in the book describe the development of manuscript and book illustrations over 4000 years and are taken from renowned books and manuscripts.

<sup>17</sup> Unnumbered page.

of this novel. In confirmation of this, the page that follows in the book contains details about the binding, which is said to be “a facsimile of the original on exhibition among the Treasures of the Vatican”.<sup>18</sup> If, to all this, we add the introduction by James Cardinal Gibbons, who describes the novel as a “clean, healthy romance, and at the same time elegant, interesting and instructive” (IX), and the presence of three engravings by Previati related to three different passages in the book, the high status of the novel is difficult to ignore.

The 1908 translation was published by George Bell and Sons, the same publisher as the 1883, 1886 and 1878 editions. This edition has the same features as the previous ones, with the only difference being that the book belongs to Bohn’s Libraries<sup>19</sup>, a series that contains works by Aristotle, Cicero, Dante, Socrates, Seneca and Shakespeare. It follows that the publisher regarded this novel as a classic.

The 1909 edition was published by P.F. Collier & Son Company, New York, and is part of the Harvard Classics Series, a fact that appears at the top of the spine, together with the Harvard symbol. The binding is of green cloth and has no decoration except for the Harvard symbol containing the wording “VERITAS”. What is usually the title page<sup>20</sup> is used to provide information about the edition. This page has decorations on the borders, with the Harvard symbol in the middle and it states that the novel is part of a limited “de luxe” edition. On the frontispiece is a portrait of the young Manzoni within a Harvard Classics frame. Glossy paper separates the frontispiece from the title page.<sup>21</sup> Following the title page is the table of contents and the introduction by the editor, whose identity is undisclosed. It states that the novel has taken “a place as the most distinguished novel of modern Italy, and has been translated into nearly all the literary languages” and that it is one of “the great novels of the world” (4). The mere fact that the novel was included in the Harvard Classics is a clear sign of its high reputation and prestige.

The 1914 edition was published by George Bell and Sons, like several ones previously analyzed. This version, however, differs from them in that it is divided into two volumes and

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<sup>18</sup> Unnumbered page.

<sup>19</sup> The reader can find information about the books contained in the Bohn’s Libraries at the end of the novel in the colophon.

<sup>20</sup> See G. Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Glossy papers are usually used to protect woodcuts.

bound in a red cloth binding with ornaments on the borders and the spine.<sup>22</sup> Inside the book, the borders of the colophon and title page are decorated with leaves arranged in groups. By reading the colophon of this publisher, we learn for the first time the story of Bohn's Libraries. The colophon is followed by a very brief description of Manzoni's life and novel, which is said to be the author's "most famous work" (II) and to have attained "a universal reputation" (II). This translation does not include the advertisement used in the previous editions. So we can conclude that a few of the aesthetic features in this edition point to the high status of the novel, but nowhere is this information verbally presented to the reader, with the exception of the colophon and the list of books at the end.

The 1924 edition was published by The MacMillan Company, New York, and has a dark red leather binding with no decoration. The title page contains the novel's title in big, bold characters followed by the Italian title in brackets, the English translation of the subtitle, the author's full name, the translator's name (Daniel J. Connor), the publisher's address, and the date of publication. In this edition, there is also an interesting epigraph by the translator:

"To the memory of the Right Rev. Eugene Augustine Garvey, a sincere admirer of Manzoni and a Churchman whom Manzoni would have admired. This version of his favorite historical romance is affectionately inscribed" (V).

This conveys a positive stance on the book, reinforced by such words as "admirer" and "favorite". This is also confirmed by the preface that follows the epigraph. In it, the translator, speaking of this novel, claims that Manzoni managed to bring back the "Italian book" (VIII) in triumph and gave it a place

"in what we call world-literature by his immortal work, the most interesting after the "Divina Commedia" and "Orlando Furioso",[...] the most printed book in Italy and the most translated into the various tongues of Europe" (VIII).

Overall, this translation fails to convey the higher status of the book from an aesthetic point of view (absence of illustrations and simple binding). Nevertheless, the translator's preface compensates for this failure, in that it gives readers a thorough idea of the worldwide prestige of the novel.

The 1959, 1965, and 1968 editions are reprinted copies of the 1951 translation and were all published by Dent Dutton, London. All have a coloured cloth binding, with no decoration except on the spine, which carries the novel's title, the author's last name, and the publisher's

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<sup>22</sup> Another major difference from the previous editions is the presence at the end of each of the two volumes of a list of books in the *Bohn's Popular Library*—Swift, Fielding, Cervantes, and Goethe, to name just a few.

mark. The first page shows the name of the series to which it belongs (Everyman's Library). As the publisher's epitext notes, this series was founded by Joseph Dent with the aim of publishing the world's classics in a format that would appeal to every kind of reader.<sup>23</sup> The title page contains the author's full name in bold characters, the English title, the Italian title followed by the English translation of the subtitle, the translator's name, and the publisher's name and location. On the back side of the title page is a brief colophon containing information on the publisher.<sup>24</sup> Following the colophon is the preface, written by the translator himself, in which an in-depth and thorough description of Manzoni's life and thought is given. From this preface one can easily infer the importance that this novel had and still has in Italy, particularly in the following words:

“Children in Italian government schools now begin studying it at the age of nine. Tuscan peasants quote pages of it by heart. It is rarely that one opens an Italian (particularly North-Italian) newspaper without seeing some phrase or theme from the book, often unacknowledged, so much has it passed into current language” (V).

The importance of the novel is also emphasized by the claim that when it was first published it attracted a lot of attention, both positive and negative—something that is quite common with great works. Although not illustrated, the translation generally manages to convey the high status and prestige of the novel through the translator's preface and the information about the series.

The 1997 edition was published by Dent, London and has a blue cloth binding with no decoration. The spine contains the name of the novel in italics and the author's full name, plus the publisher's mark. In this edition, the publisher's peritext consists of 1) half-title page, 2) title page, 3) colophon, 4) table of contents, 5) notes on the author and editors, 6) chronology of Manzoni's life and times, 7) editors' introduction, 8) notes on the text, 9) a map of northern and central Italy in 1630 showing the main places mentioned in the novel, 10) a series of critiques about the novel from 1827 to 1988, 11) a text summary, and 11) acknowledgements.<sup>25</sup> From the way the book is organized, it is possible to hypothesize that the intended readers are university students. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that the book is edited by David Forgacs and

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<sup>23</sup> On the same page, there is also the genre indication (Fiction) and an epigraph that reads as follows “Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide, In the most need to go by thy side”. This quotation is present in other Dent editions of *I promessi Sposi* and, in general, in all publications belonging to this series.

<sup>24</sup> At the end of the book there is also some further information about Everyman's Library and the authors included in this fiction collection, among whom Sir Walter Scott, Eliot and Hugo stand out.

<sup>25</sup> The last three paratextual elements are found at the end of the novel.

Matthew Reynolds, respectively a University Lecturer and a Junior Research Fellow at Cambridge.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the academic look and style given to the book by the editors, readers can become acquainted with the author's genius and the novel's prestige by reading the preface and the critiques inserted at the end of the novel by such writers as Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, Gramsci, Edgar Allan Poe and D.H. Lawrence.

#### **4 Conclusion**

On the whole, all the translations examined here manage, to convey through their paratextual elements the classical quality, prestige and high status that the original text has had in Italy ever since its publication. Some do so through the use of expensive bindings, decorations and illustrations (1845, 1878, 1914); others convey the prestige verbally, by means of prefaces, colophons and other additional information about the publication, such as translators' advertisements, series titles, or edition details (1900, 1924, 1959, 1965, 1968, 1997); and still others convey this prestige through a combination of aesthetic and verbal paratextual elements (1883, 1886, 1889, 1906, 1908). We can conclude from this analysis that the generally negative reviews in England did not affect subsequent English publishers' attitude towards the book, which turned out to be quite positive, as demonstrated by their adoption of paratextual features that highlight the novel's prestige.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it proposes a different way of analyzing translations. When it comes to studying the translation product and process, most scholars focus on the verbal elements of the text, without paying attention to other traces that the translator and other agents in the translation process left around and outside the text. As previously mentioned, these traces can tell us a lot about translation strategies and processes and about readers' reception of the translation, so a study of these paratextual elements can help fill in the gaps in translation history.

The above analysis is a small-scale one, and it was not possible to examine all English and American versions of the novel. Therefore, a future step will be to look at the remaining translations and determine whether the findings hold true. This will help corroborate the hypothesis of this paper and strengthen its main argument. It would also be interesting to

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<sup>26</sup> This intended audience can also be inferred by reading the introduction, which is used to discuss Manzoni's interest in history and to analyze the political, religious, historical and psychological strands of the novel.

ascertain whether there is any correlation between the status of the translator and that of the novel. Indeed, the status of a foreign novel and its author could be studied by examining the translator's reputation and how the latter in its turn affects the translation's success or failure in the target market.

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