



# An Analysis of the Italian Dubbing of Edgar Allan Poe's Poems in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

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**Abstract**— This paper will analyse the Italian dubbing of Edgar Allan Poe Poems in the gothic horror drama “The Fall of the House of Usher” (2023) by Mike Flanagan. Specifically, the poems that will be analysed are “Annabel Lee” and “The City in the Sea”. The analysis will be pursued following a qualitative approach. Poems will be examined individually, and the original English version will be compared to the Italian dubbing through a detailed discourse analysis. Particular attention was given to the level of literary rendering in the Italian version, lip movement visibility and the overall changes detected within the two versions of the poems. The two poems have been translated largely literally in the Italian version. Examining the results, it can be confirmed that the lip movement had a minor influence on the translation choices. The Italian dubbed version maintains the original meaning of the poem coherently with the scenes and contexts in which these are recited in the miniseries.



**Keywords**— Translation Studies, Audiovisual Translation, Dubbing, Poetry Translation, Edgar Allan Poe

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dubbing is part of the wider category of audiovisual translation. Audiovisual translation is characterised by determining major challenges for the translator compared to textual translation. Besides the usual challenges that the translator faces while translating a text from a source language to a target one such as elements with specific cultural references, specific linguistic characteristics and linguistic expressions strictly tied to culture, (Chiaro, 2008) during the dubbing process, the audiovisual translator will necessarily have to take into account elements such as the background scene, sounds and lip movements that cannot be deleted or modified.

This paper will analyse the Italian dubbing of the gothic horror drama “The Fall of the House of Usher” (2023) by Mike Flanagan. Specifically, it was decided to work on the translation and dubbing of poetry, often considered among the most challenging. The focus will be on two poems written by the English poet Edgar Allan Poe that are recited by characters at different moments throughout the miniseries. Specifically, the poems that will be analysed are “Annabel Lee” and “The City in the Sea”.

After an introduction to the object of discussion which will include an explanation of the miniseries plot and a background on the two poems, the methods will be explained to successively move to a brief discussion on the main theories regarding dubbing and poetry translation supporting this paper, the analysis of the dubbing of the poems and consequent conclusions.

## II. OBJECT OF DISCUSSION

The Fall of the House of Usher is a gothic horror drama created by American director Mike Flanagan and directed by Flanagan himself and Michael Fimognari. The miniseries is divided into 8 episodes, telling us the story of the Usher family. It was released on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 on Netflix. The miniseries starts with Roderick Usher now in his seventies calling his former lawyer and now rival in a trial Auguste Dupin to give him a dreaded confession in the Usher’s childhood home.

We get to know Roderick as the CEO of Fortunato Pharmaceutical, which he rules alongside his twin sister Madeline. We will learn a lot concerning Roderick’s life

starting from the explanation of the mysterious deaths of his six kids, how he ascended to power and of his former, lost and true love Annabel Lee. The public won't be aware until the last episode of how the origin of the twin's wealth and success date back to the happenings of New Year's Eve of 1979. After betraying Dupin in the trial against Fortunato, the twins murdered the then-CEO of the pharmaceutical company Rufus Griswold on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1979, as the last step to take control of the company. They then headed to a bar to create an alibi where they met Verna, a portrayal of the black Raven from Poe's poem "The Raven" (Verna is an anagram for raven). Verna proposes a deadly deal to the twins, guaranteeing that they will not be caught and convicted for the committed crime and promising them a life of wealth. The price to pay will consist of the death of Madeline and Roderick's bloodline right before the twins' deaths. (Fremont, 2023; Thao, 2024)

The miniseries contains references to Edgar Allan Poe's work, the title comes from the short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" dated 1839. Besides the title, numerous references can be found, starting with the title of every single episode, the name and storyline of the characters and the former's lines in which some of them recite poems by Poe. (Lee, 2023)

Let's now introduce the poems that are the object of discussion and analysis of this paper.

#### ANNABEL LEE

Annabel Lee was published posthumously on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1849, only two days following Edgar Allan Poe's death. (Law, 1922). The poem tells us the story from the point of view of a solitary mourner lamenting the loss of his wife who was taken away "by a wind that blew out of a cloud by night" (Poe, 1849). The mourner remarks on how they loved each other with a "love that was more than love" in a Kingdom by the Sea, claiming how the wind that had taken his beautiful Annabel Lee was sent by angels in heaven who were envious of their love. He also claims that their soul could never be separated because:

the moon never beams, without bringing me  
dreams

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

(Poe, 1849).

In the miniseries, Annabel Lee, portrayed by actress Katy Parker, is Roderick Usher's ex-wife and mother of his two oldest kids. Annabel is allegedly believed to be Roderick's true love, who separated from him after

discovering Roderick's plan to own Fortunato Pharmaceutical. Following the divorce, Annabel could not accept the separation from her kids who decided to leave her for their father following Roderick's newfound wealth after his promotion as CEO of Fortunato. Like the protagonist of Poe's poem, we learn that Roderick's ex-wife died years before, likely suicidal following the events mentioned above. The poem is recited by both, young and old Roderick Usher on different occasions which we will analyse in the discussion section.

#### THE CITY IN THE SEA

"The City in the Sea" was published in the form now available in 1845. The poem explores many themes highly related to those of the miniseries, including destruction, death and sin. Two unfinished versions of the poem appeared prior to its final publication with the titles "The Doomed City" and "The City of Sin". (*The Poe Museum*, 2024) The poem tells us about a city where "Death has reared himself a throne" and where everyone no matter if good or bad "have gone to their eternal rest." (Poe, 1845) No light illuminates the city but a light from the "lurid sea" which is usually very still. Something changes towards the end when the air starts to stir and the water to wave, till the city begins to sink till

Down, down that town shall settle hence,

Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,

Shall do it reverence

(Poe, 1845)

Verna recites The City in the Sea while confronting Madeline in the Usher's childhood home in her final days. Unlike Annabel Lee, The City in The Sea is recited on one occasion only. We will analyse it in the discussion section.

### III. METHOD

The analysis will be pursued following a qualitative approach. Poems will be analysed individually, and the original English version will be compared to the Italian dubbing through a detailed discourse analysis. The original version and the dubbed one will be transcribed exactly as they are recited in The Fall of the House of Usher and copied in this paper to be consulted. Studies on translation, poetry translation and audiovisual translation will support the analysis. The focus will be whether the poems have been translated literally or adapted after the dubbing process. The results will also be contextualised considering the nature of the scenes in which the poems are

recited and whether or not the lip movement is seen when these are recited.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Translating a text from a source language to a target one always implies an effort for the translator to find the best strategy to deal with elements such as cultural, references, specific linguistic characteristics and expressions strictly tied to cultural elements. (Chiaro, 2008). However, challenges can vary depending on the type of text the translator is working on. This paper will analyse two sub-categories of translation, poetry translation and dubbing.

Poetry translation is widely known to be one of the most challenging subcategories of translation, of which translatability has been historically highly debated among scholars. Poems usually do not have official translations, and many translated versions of one poem can be found, including the Italian versions of Annabel Lee and The City in the Sea. Compared to other kinds of translation, poetry translation is often considered to be tailored for translators having high critical and special writing abilities as a translated poem must be poetry itself and it "is difficult, cryptic, ambiguous and exhibits a special relationship between form and meaning" (Boase-Beier, 1998).

Dubbing is a sub-category of audiovisual translation. Audiovisual translation refers to that typology of translation which aims at the translation of original dialogues of audiovisual products, namely, those products that communicate their message through both, the visual and the acoustic channels. (Perego, 2005). Many are the typologies of audiovisual translation, with the most popular being dubbing and subtitling. The focus of this article is on dubbing which is characterized by major challenges compared to other forms of audiovisual translation. Dubbing implies that the original text is translated into the target language, registered and then added to the movie so that it substitutes the dialogues in the source language. Dubbing is tendentially more expensive and time-consuming. As for poetry translation, dubbing will determine a major consideration and effort by the translator that goes beyond the translatability of cultural and linguistic elements. The original dialogue may be subjected to major changes considering their subordination to lip synchronisation. Furthermore, it is necessary to maintain coherence with scenes and sounds, elements that cannot be modified within the dubbing process. (Diaz-Cintas, 1999; Perego, 2005)

Seeing the stated evidence, translating and dubbing poetry will require considerable effort by the translator, who must translate poems and adapt them following the rules

and variants one must consider within the dubbing process. As anticipated above, no official Italian translation exists for Poe's work. The Italian dubbing of the two poems will now be transcribed to detect the strategy used to create an adequate transposition of the source text into the dubbed version. The focus will be whether the poems have been translated literally or adapted after the dubbing process. The results will also be contextualised considering the nature of the scenes in which the poems are recited and whether the lip movement is seen when these are recited. In this section, the text in the original English version is transcribed and compared to the Italian dubbing, while the analysis will be discussed in the following section. The underlined verses are those that are recited with visible lip movement.

#### ANNABEL LEE

The poem is recited on multiple occasions during the miniseries. We first hear it recited by a young Roderick, displaying his love for Annabel during their time together. The poem is also recited later in the miniseries by older Roderick while remembering the now-gone Annabel. For this reason, the poem will be divided into 4 different sections named after the episodes in which the transcribed stanza is recited.

#### *Episode 2 – The Masque of the Red Death*

The first stanza of Annabel Lee is recited, as anticipated, by a young Roderick during his time with Annabel when the two are still much in love with each other. This is the first time we are introduced to the character of Roderick's former wife. In this scene, Annabel encourages Roderick to leave Fortunato, of which he was an employee at the time, after a humiliating work meeting with mounting discontent of Roderick's twin sister Madeline.

#### *Original English Version*

**Young Roderick:** It was many and many a year ago,

In a kingdom by the sea,

That a maiden there lived whom you may know

By the name of Annabel Lee;

And this maiden she lived with no other thought

Than to love and be loved by me.

#### *Italian Dubbed Version*

**Young Roderick:** Orson molti e molti anni,

Che in un regno in riva al mare,

Viveva una fanciulla  
 che con nome chiamerete di Annabel Lee;  
E viveva questa fanciulla con non altro pensiero  
Che d'amar me e d'essere amata da me

#### Episode 3 - Murder at the Rue Morgue

The second stanza is recited by a young Roderick within the same period as the first while remembering his time with Annabel. In this scene, Roderick recites the stanza after Annabel is the only person showing him support for the tiny promotion and bonus he received after Fortunato's CEO Rufus Griswold stole his idea for the Ligodone pills.

#### Original English Version

**Young Roderick:** I was a child and she was a child,  
In this kingdom by the sea,  
But we loved with a love that was more than love—  
I and my Annabel Lee—  
 With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven  
 Coveted her and me.

#### Italian Dubbed Version

**Young Roderick:** Io ero un bambino e lei era una bambina,  
In questo regno in riva al mare,  
Ma ci amavamo di un amore che era più che amore,  
Io e Annabel Lee.  
 Un amore che i serafini alati del cielo  
 Invidiavano a lei e a me.

#### Episode 7 - The Pit and the Pendulum

The third stanza of Annabel Lee is recited by present-day Roderick during his "confession" to Dupin in his and Madeline's childhood home. Roderick recites the stanza after Dupin claims that he managed to trust him thanks to his wife Annabel, seeing that such a good and trustful loved him, praising Annabel and wondering how she hung on so long with Roderick.

#### Original English Version

**Present-Day Roderick:** And this was the reason that, long ago,

In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling  
My beautiful Annabel Lee;  
So that her highborn kinsmen came  
 And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulchre  
In this kingdom by the sea.

#### Italian Dubbed Version

**Present-Day Roderick:** E per questa ragione anni orsono,  
In quel regno in riva al mare,  
Un vento soffiato da una nube raggelò  
La mia bella Annabel Lee;  
Così vennero i suoi nobili cari  
 La portarono via da me,  
Per chiuderla in un sepolcro  
In questo regno in riva al mare

#### Episode 8 – The Raven

In the same way as the third one, the fifth and sixth stanzas of Annabel Lee are recited by present-day Roderick during his confession. The fifth stanza is recited by Roderick while remembering to see Annabel sitting in the church during the funeral of their kids. The seventh and final stanza is recited right after the former spouses talk, with Annabel claiming that Roderick killed their kids twice by bribing them to want to be with him thanks to his wealth. It is at this moment that we find out about the alleged suicide committed by Annabel, who could not live after his children chose Roderick instead of her. After we see Annabel approaching his kids' coffins and a flashback of a fight between the former spouses following Roderick's sabotage of the trial against Fortunato, present-day Roderick recites the final stanza when images of a devastated Annabel at their kids' side are shown.

#### Original English Version

**Present-Day Roderick:** But our love was stronger by far  
than the love  
Of those who were older than we—  
Of many far wiser than we—  
 And neither the angels in Heaven above  
 Nor the demons down under the sea  
 Can ever dissever my soul from the soul

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 (...)
   
For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams  
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
 Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,  
 In her sepulchre there by the sea—  
 In her tomb by the sounding sea.

*Italian Dubbed Version*

**Present-Day Roderick:** Ma il nostro Amore era molto più forte

Che l'amor d'altri di noi più maturi,

Che l'amor d'altri di noi più saggi.

E né gli angeli lassù nel cielo

Né i demoni da giù nel profondo mare

Mai potran separare la mia anima

Dall'anima della bella Annabel Lee;

(...)

Giacche mai splende luna che non mi porti sogni

Della bella Annabel Lee;

Né mai sorgono stelle che io veda i fulgenti occhi

Della bella Annabel Lee.

E così ogni notte io giaccio al fianco del mio amore

Mio amore mia vita e mia sposa,

Nel suo sepolcro in riva al mare,

Nella sua tomba su risonante mare.

THE CITY IN THE SEA

Is Verna who recites the poem The City in the Sea after being confronted by Madeline in the Usher's childhood home. After an attempt by Madeline to renegotiate the terms of the deal she and Roderick made with Verna on New Year's Eve of 1979, Verna recites the poem she claimed to have written to offer "clarity" on how things cannot be changed to Madeline.

*Original English Version*

**Verna:** Lo! Death has reared himself a throne

In a strange city lying alone

Far down within the dim West,

Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best

Have gone to their eternal rest.

No rays from the holy Heaven come down

On the long night-time of that town;

But light from out the lurid sea

Streams up the turrets silently.

Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—

Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—

Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers

Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—

Resignedly beneath the sky

The melancholy waters lie.

But lo, a stir is in the air!

The wave—there is a movement there!

The waves have now a redder glow—

The hours are breathing faint and low—

And when, amid no earthly moans,

Down, down that town shall settle hence,

Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,

Shall do it reverence.

*Italian Dubbed Version*

**Verna:** Ecco! Morte ha elevato a sé stessa un trono,

In una strana città che giace sola

Laggiù nell'occidente fosco,

Dove i buoni e cattivi, i peggiori e i migliori

Sono andati al loro eterno riposo.

Non un raggio dal sacro cielo discende

Sulla lunga notte di quella città;

Sa un chiarore dal mare spaventoso

Scorre silenziosamente su per le torri.

Su cupole e pinnacoli, sui saloni regali,

Sui templi su mura babiloniche,

Su ombrosi pergolati obliati da tempo,

Di edera scolpita e fiori di pietra.

Rassegnativi ai piedi del cielo

Le malinconiche acque ristagnano.

Ma ecco, c'è un fremito nell'aria.

Un'onda, qualcosa si muove laggiù!

Le onde adesso emanano un più rosso bagliore.  
 Le ore respirano deboli e sommesse,  
 E quando in fine tra non terreni lamenti,  
 In fondo, in fondo quella città finirà per posarsi,  
L'inferno innalzandosi da mille troni,  
a essa farà la riverenza.

## V. RESULTS

### *Annabel Lee*

In the miniseries, only five of the six stanzas of Annabel Lee are recited by Roderick, with the fourth one omitted. The poem is translated quite literally. Regarding the first stanza, a slight change was made to the phrasing of the verse "whom you may know By the name of Annabel Lee which was rendered as "whom you will call by the name of Annabell Lee". The dubbing of the second stanza was also interpreted slightly differently in the verses "I and my Annabel I and my Annabel Lee—With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven". I and my Annabel Lee was translated simply as "Me and Annabel Lee" omitting the possessive my of the original version, while in the second cited verse, Heaven has been rendered with the antonomasia "of the skies". The third stanza is translated literally with no major changes to be pointed out. Two slight vocabulary modifications can be detected in the fifth stanza. The first one regards the verse "Of those who were older than we". The word "old" was translated with the word "mature", having a literal meaning different from the original word used in English. However, "mature" can also be used in Italian to describe someone older. The final stanza was also literally translated. The word "darling" was rendered as "love" in Italian. Darling is usually more associable with adjectives such as "Cara" or "Tesoro" in the Italian language, however, it does not change the meaning of the verse.

Overall, the poem maintains its original meaning and form with little vocabulary modifications that do not determine major changes.

### *The City in the Sea*

The City in The Sea is originally composed of four stanzas, in the miniseries Verna recites verses from three of them, precisely from the first, second and fourth one. The stanzas are not entirely recited. Regarding the first stanza, Verna recites the verses one to five. The stanza is translated quite literally. The more dated terms have been rendered with words of similar or identical meaning. The

exclamation "Lo!" in the first verse, which corresponds to a modern "oh!", was translated with the term "ecco!" which even though is a term still now in use in the Italian language, carries the same meaning as "Lo" aiming to direct attention to something. The verb "reared" past of "to rear" is also present in the first verse, which indicates that bringing up something to a higher level was translated with the verb "elevare", having a similar meaning in the Italian language. Finally, the word "dim" in the third verse, which refers to the light of a determined object being not clear or obscure, was rendered with the word "fosco" in Italian, a dated word carrying a similar meaning which was used to indicate something being greyish or dark.

The second stanza is also rendered quite literally. The verses recited by Verna are verses one to four, six to nine, thirteen and fourteen. In the dubbing of the first verse, we have a rendering of the word Heaven which was also detected in the dubbing of Annabelle Lee. Heaven is translated into "sacro Cielo" meaning "sacred sky", instead of the Italian literal translation "paradiso". A worth mentioning rendering is the translation of the word "lurid" referring to the sea in the third verse. The word lurid in English is an adjective associated with something unpleasant often referring to the colour shade. In the Italian dubbed version lurid was translated with "spaventoso", meaning "scary" in Italian. The list of buildings and structures cited in verses six to nine are all translated literally, with the ones in the Italian version being rendered with words commonly used to this day except "pergolato" which is the rendering of "bowers". The word long forgotten was rendered with the dated term "obliati", which has the same meaning but is not commonly used in today's Italian. In the fourteenth verse, the verb "lie" which refers to the waters was rendered with the Italian "ristagnano", which could be translated with the verb "to stagnate". Overall, it does not change the original meaning of the verse.

The fourth and final stanza also presents a quite literal translation. The verses recited by Verna are verses one and two and verses seven to twelve. In the first verse, we have the same rendering of the exclamation "Lo!" that could be detected in the first stanza, translated into Italian with the corresponding contemporary exclamation "Ecco". No elements need to be pointed out in the remaining verses recited, the translation results quite literally as anticipated, with both versions presenting a highly poetic language not commonly used in contemporary English and Italian.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the Italian dubbing of the poems "Annabel Lee" and "The City in the Sea". Considering that no official Italian translation exists for

both poems, these have been compared paying particular attention to the detection of the level of literary in which they have been rendered in Italian, the influence of lip-synchronization in the translation highlighting the extract of the verses that are recited with visible lip movement and whether the overall meaning and coherence with the scene differ between the two versions.

Overall, the two examined poems have been translated literary with no or little changes, mostly relative to vocabulary choices. Changing in phrasing is rare and never modifies the original meaning of the verses. The influence of lip movement was minimal. As we can see in the above sections many of the verses of the two poems are recited without visible lip movement. However, there is no evident difference in how the verses with visible lip movement were rendered compared to those where the lips of the character reciting the poem were not visible.

Taking the stated evidence into account, the Italian version of both poems was rendered in a way that maintains the original nuance of the meaning of the original versions. Both poems maintained a poetic language and coherence to the scene.

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