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TRANSLATING *THE END OF THE WORLD* LUDICALLY

From playing Sudoku to playing Gossip

ABSTRACT: Based on the author's experiences of translating Ernesto De Martino's work, this article discusses some of the challenges and risks of this endeavor, with a specific focus on her work translating *La fine del mondo* [The End of the World]. Above and beyond the general problems of translating De Martino, which the author has treated elsewhere (Zinn 2015), *La fine del mondo* poses a number of particular difficulties: among these, the article considers the nature of the book as an edited, posthumous volume; the heterogeneous languages and styles it incorporates; and the immense challenge of the philosophical language employed. To address these, the author offers insights into her translation atelier. From her considerations regarding the process of translating De Martino, the author then moves to a broader reflection on how *The End of the World* may or may not be received internationally: to what extent does De Martino risk getting caught in an erudite version of the children's gossip game, in which passing the message from one player to the next leads to serious distortion when the last player says what they've heard? Will a De Martino that circulates only based on knowledge of the translation(s) produce visions of his scholarship that are unrecognizable or unpalatable to Italian-speaking scholars? The author concludes by inviting us to play with AI translation, assessing the potential of these technologies as ludic partners.

KEYWORDS: Ernesto De Martino; Translation; Play; Artificial Intelligence.

There is an element in the title of this article that might seem inappropriate: the notion of doing a translation "ludically". Indeed, it might in fact appear highly irreverent, since I am talking about Ernesto De Martino's *La fine del mondo* (De Martino 2019; translated as *The End of the World* [De Martino 2023]), his masterwork dealing with apocalypse in human thought and experience. After all, apocalypse is serious business. Yet in the process of doing the translation, when I was invited to the Käte Hamburger Center for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) at Heidelberg University in 2022, I discovered to my great surprise that scholars working on apocalypse have an excellent sense of humor, whether we should attribute this to a coping mechanism, a quirky personality trait common to them or some other explanation. A glass cabinet of apocalypse-themed games that occupied a privileged spot in the CAPAS corridor demonstrated to me that it was not necessarily a travesty to align "play" and "apocalypse" together conceptually.

My ludic perspective on translating De Martino predates my work on *The End of the World*, however. Anyone familiar with De Martino's work in Italian can easily imagine that he poses some major challenges for translation, and I have dealt with some of these in previous discussions (Zinn 2015). But for me, the difficulties in translating De Martino give me the same kind of endorphinic stimulation that other people get from doing sudoku, or perhaps more aptly, word games like Wordle or a good old crossword puzzle, except that the scale is immensely greater. As I work on one of his texts, I enter into my "De Martino zone". This includes trying to connect with the period in which De Martino was writing —the very time in which I was born— and align with his background as a Crocean-influenced, left-wing Southern Italian intellectual of the mid-twentieth century. In the case of *The End of the World*, this period was marked by a different structure of feeling from the ones that characterized my previous translations: the historical world that De Martino inhabited felt the clamoring of decolonization movements and newly independent states, the Cold War and the threat of thermonuclear destruction. It also felt the disillusionment with Stalinism in many quarters of the Marxist Left, and at the same time, the

ecumenical openings of Vatican II.¹ The shadow of the Shoah, indeed a general undercurrent of Western irrationality, lingered heavily and more explicitly. And on a personal level, while writing this opus De Martino was battling cancer and faced with the end of his own personal world.

As solitary as this process can be, I have been fortunate to have many friends who can give me help —as with the "phone call home" option one sometimes sees on television game shows, in which the player is allowed to contact family or a friend for an answer. In the case of *The End of the World*, these special friends were above all Marcello Massenzio and Sergio Fabio Berardini, whose support was utterly invaluable. For more than a year they patiently dialogued with me on long lists of queries I had, especially in the areas of religious history, philosophy and demartinology more broadly; in my Preface to the translation (Zinn 2023), I acknowledge still other people who contributed to my work on the project. On the whole, however, it was more of a solitaire than a team sport. There was no one besides me who had already translated a book-length work by De Martino into English, only some passages and one article (De Martino 2012).² I had already worked carefully on my choices in terminology in the previous translations, aware that I was somehow setting precedents, and in *The End of the World* I remained coherent with

¹ While I have not explored this, I have often thought that several parts of *The End of the World* should be read in the light of Vatican II.

² The French translation of 2016 was created by a group of five translators working under the direction of the editors, who then made sure that the parts were consistent. The only other English translation of a monograph by De Martino has been *Il mondo magico* by an unidentified translator (*Primitive Magic*, De Martino 1972). While the text is accurate from a strictly linguistic point of view (despite the translator skipping passages when the going got rough), from the title on, this New-Age inflected translation is utterly inadequate for understanding De Martino's thinking.

those choices. As for general stylistics, João de Pina Cabral generously offered numerous suggestions for making the prose more elegant, though he is certainly not responsible for any of the remaining flaws. In this article, I make visible some of the backstage to the translation of *La fine del mondo*, and I discuss some of the elements that I toyed with, so to speak, to stay within the ludic metaphor. I focus first on some of the conditions influencing the translation, the general approach I took, and some of the specific choices I made. I conclude by speculating on how the game might continue, whether as an international “gossip game”, or with the new possibilities that artificial intelligence affords.³

Some general considerations

As challenging as my other De Martino translations have been to carry out (*The Land of Remorse* [*La terra del rimorso*] and *Magic: A Theory from the South* [*Sud e magia*], respectively De Martino 2005a and 2015), *The End of the World* truly presented another level of difficulty. Above and beyond the specific elements that I discuss below, it is important to keep in mind that this book itself was a work of translation on different levels. First, as is well known, it was a reconstruction of the book that De Martino was writing at the time of his death in 1965. Just as translation from one language to another is a subjective enterprise, so too is such an act of reconstruction, albeit a scientific basis lies at its heart. The scholars who have taken on the task of editing *La fine del mondo* have done extensive research in the De Martino Archive in order to orient their editorial decisions: from Clara Gallini in the 1977 edition (De Martino 1977), to Gallini and Marcello Massenzio in 2002 (De Martino 2002), to Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre and Massenzio in 2016 (De Martino 2016), who overhauled the previous editions while simultaneously translating the work into French. It was from the Italian version of this new edition (De Martino 2019) that I worked, although I consulted the French edition on many occasions.

From the very start I was not entirely free in my translation, since the publisher — The University of Chicago Press — imposed a strict word count ceiling in order to guarantee that the book’s selling price would remain within a certain limit. Based on the fact that the length of Italian texts generally exceeds their English versions by around 15%, I was able to cautiously guesstimate the word count of the entire manuscript as I was working, and although I periodically made preliminary counts in different phases of the project, I could not be close to exact until a very advanced stage in the translation. Moreover, I needed to leave room for the preface, introduction, glossary and

³ I thank the editors of this CoSMo issue for including this piece, and I appreciate the thoughtful comments made by the anonymous reviewers, whose suggestions I have tried to incorporate here as far as possible without overhauling the focus of the text.

annotations. The uncertainty over space was a constant source of tension, and for this reason I kept a list of possible sections that I thought I could reasonably, if regrettably, sacrifice in case I went over the word count. The only cuts that were clear from the start were based on my decision to leave out the extensive essays and commentaries by the editors and perform a literal appendectomy, removing the essay “Apocalissi culturali e apocalissi psicopatologiche”, to be published separately in English (De Martino 2025). As for the editors’ annotations, I dealt with them on a case-by-case basis, translating only those that seemed to me to be most essential for the English language reader, differentiating them from my own annotations. In the process of doing the translation, I came across numerous small errors on De Martino’s part: this is understandable, given the unfinished nature of his writing. Where I felt there was some utility in pointing out an error, I annotated this for the reader, but there were many more instances than what ended up in annotation. As for De Martino’s writing, in order to ward off the specter of excessive length, throughout my work on the translation I would choose phrasing with fewer words. I kept the Introduction shorter than I would have liked, but then again, my editor at Chicago Press felt that it was better not to give too strict guidance to the work and leave readers freer to create their own interpretations (a point I will return to toward the end of this essay). For this volume, unlike my previous translations of De Martino, I thought that a glossary would be beneficial. The few pages I dedicated to this purpose turned out to be well worth the investment, for my colleague Fabio Dei, in giving me feedback on the entries, said that he found the glossary to be so useful that he hoped they would add one to the Italian edition, too. In the end, having been so mindful of the length limitations, thankfully it was not necessary to do any further pruning, and I was able to fully respect the structure of De Martino’s core text from the 2019 edition.

Overall, though, in translating *La fine del mondo*, my general approach was much the same as with the previous two monographs. With De Martino’s writings I have always emphasized a more literal, scientific translation versus a freer, literary translation, with a rendering that stays very close to the original text. I did not eliminate De Martino’s numerous repetitions, which are even more evident in this volume due to its unpolished nature. For the purposes of creating a smoother English translation, I tended to break up excessively long sentence structures into more easily digested bits; despite this, Chicago’s marvelous copy editor Steve LaRue did catch some passages that still needed further treatment in English. Like the other works by De Martino that I have translated, *La fine del mondo* is written in an antiquated mid-twentieth-century Italian characteristic of intellectuals in that period. Above and beyond this general fact, the text features some usages that are problematic by today’s politically correct standards: De Martino makes extensive use of the “universal man”, for example, which for the most part I translated as “humankind”, “humanity”, or “people”, unless these forms were in sources cited by De Martino himself. We even see gender insensitivity in his translations from other languages, such as when he translates “die Kranke” (a female patient) from German as

masculine (“il malato ... se stesso”). And for male-inflected terms like *padri* (as in “forefathers”) and *patria*, I chose more gender-neutral equivalents. Another problematic element for today’s reader is the presence of some racializing language (*primitive* and *meticci* [“half-castes”]), although De Martino himself sheds a critical slant on the use of the term “primitive”, usually qualifying it with “so-called”. My approach to all such items in the translation was not aimed at “woke-ifying” De Martino, but at finding a balance that recognizes who he was in his context while mitigating the impact of some elements that might be jarring for contemporary readers.

In comparison with my past experiences with De Martino, this book presents some peculiarities, such as De Martino’s use of gerunds. I reflected on this extensively and decided to try, in general, to maintain these gerunds in English, at least where they were not particularly awkward. My reasoning was that in most instances De Martino could have chosen to use a noun, there being a similar difference between noun and gerund forms in Italian, so if he made such a decision intentionally, whether or not it reflected a true conceptual subtlety on his part, I thought it appropriate to respect his stylistic choice, which was common in academic writing of that period. In any case, De Martino’s use of gerunds lends a dynamic quality to the writing, and I believe that it is fitting to try to convey this to the reader.

Tracking down original texts

De Martino’s preparatory materials for the book included extensive excerpts from the works that he was studying, much of which found a place in the 1977 and 2002 editions of the book. In the 2016 edition, the editors decided to remove these excerpts if they were not commented on by De Martino, leaving to a far greater extent than before the core of the book featuring De Martino’s original essays and passages. Even so, his writings include copious citations from dozens of authors, many of which De Martino himself translated into Italian. Not all of the works he consulted were available in Italian, nor did De Martino always avail himself of existing translations: his decision to translate from Proust directly rather than use Natalia Ginzburg’s translation is a case in point.

The University of Chicago Press had stipulated that I would need to translate all quoted material directly from the original source, which is something that I would have done anyhow, as I did with the previous monographs. Fortunately, the languages involved were mainly French and German, languages with which I have a good familiarity. Where I was able to find an extant English edition of a text cited by De Martino, I would make use of that. This latter solution, however, was not always a viable one: some works simply had no English translation available (e.g. Alfred Ernout’s works; Henri Ey’s *Études psychiatriques*; Enzo Paci’s *Il nulla e il problema dell’uomo*; and the *Lexicon* of Festus, which is still being translated by scholars with the Festus Lexicon

Project at University College London). At times it was difficult, if not impossible, to parse where an essay from one book might be translated in English, as there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the contents of a book in its original language and the venues for their translation. There were several such instances with the works by Mircea Eliade, Benedetto Croce and Ludwig Binswanger. Karl Kerényi's *Töchter der Sonne* did not have an exact correspondence with *Goddesses of Sun and Moon* in English. The English version of Eliade's *Traité* eluded me until, after an extenuating search in Columbia's Butler Library, I finally understood that it was published as *Patterns in comparative religion*. And even then, I was hard pressed to find the exact citation by De Martino, who all too often (maddingly enough for me) blithely paraphrased his sources. For some texts there was instead the problem of having too many English translations, for example with Dostoevsky and Proust, but also with Rimbaud's poetry and the Bible. Through a cousin I managed to contact two scholars of Christianity at the University of Oklahoma, and, apart from advice on some Christian terminology, they recommended using the New Revised Standard Version, which is fortunately available and searchable online. I consulted four different English translations of *Swann's Way* before settling on Lydia Davis's (for the record: Moncrieff, Kilmartin's revision of Moncrieff, Grieve and Davis).

I spent a great deal of time in the libraries at the University of Cologne and Columbia University in order to track down original sources. This was an extremely cumbersome task, not simply a matter of finding the books or articles: I needed to match citations from De Martino with the originals, and De Martino's exasperating habit of paraphrasing and/or chopping up direct citations into pieces to incorporate into his own text repeatedly complicated my work, forcing me to look for material over a span of many pages or even chapters. Within a single block of text, Martino often left out parts in his translations: in such cases, I either added these parts back in with my translation or I more clearly indicated the omission. De Martino makes extensive use of texts that were in German (Mühlmann, Storch and Kulenkampff, Jaspers, Lommel), much of which was not already available in English translation. Jaspers' monumental *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* has been translated in two lengthy volumes; nonetheless it was not always an easy matter to track down specific passages. Some of Lommel's and Petri's work on Australian Aboriginal groups had been translated into English, but using different transliterations for indigenous terms. So I consulted the originals in German (Lommel 1952; Petri 1950), originals in English (Lommel 1950), and English translations (Lommel 1997, Petri 2014) —and then I asked colleagues who specialize in Oceania for what they considered to be the current usages in English. Although I would work from the German original rather than translate from De Martino's own Italian translation, I did make sure I kept De Martino's version in mind. And through doing so, I occasionally discovered some interesting discrepancies between his translations and the

original text. De Martino had an excellent grasp of German,⁴ which leads me to think that such discrepancies were not casual. For example, in relating Storch's case study of a schizophrenic (the famous Bernese peasant), De Martino cites the exchange between the patient and the psychiatrist:

Gli uomini non sono più nel loro ambiente domestico, in un mondo appaesato (*die Menschen sind nicht mehr zu Hause*). Anche io non sono al posto giusto, dove si è di casa (*wo man zu Hause ist*). (Le cose potranno andar meglio) quando gli uomini riavranno le loro cose, quando saranno di nuovo appaesati nel loro posto giusto (*wenn sie wieder daheim sind am richtigen Ort*). E questo gli uomini riusciranno a fare, quando avrò ritrovato il mio mondo familiare (*Wenn ich wieder daheim bin*). (De Martino 2019, 99)

De Martino's translation here provides more of a paraphrase than a literal translation, ventriloquizing the patient in such a way that the latter's commentary aligns better with De Martino's own phenomenological perspective, as reflected in the use of his neologism *appaesato* (which I discuss below). I chose to render the passage in a more literal fashion; moreover, I reinserted some phrases from the original that De Martino had left out, while noting an omission:

"People are no longer home. I, too, am no longer in the right place" (What is the right place?) "Where one is at home." (When will the world get better?) "When [the people] have their things back, when they are home again in the right place. When everything is in order again." [...] (How will the people down there manage that?) "When I am home again." (De Martino 2023, 18)

This was not the only occasion in which I found such a tendency on De Martino's part to tweak a source to better suit his theoretical perspective. Another good example of this appeared in a quote from Jaspers: "Il pensiero simbolico dei primitivi ha luogo per entro un comune orientamento spirituale che si è sviluppato solo scarsamente in senso razionale..." (De Martino 2019, 191). Leaving aside De Martino's quirky "per entro",⁵ what appears important to me is his translation of Jaspers' "bildhafte Denken" as *pensiero simbolico*, which repeats a few lines below: "pensiero simbolico e il contenuto dei simboli", which in Jaspers's original text is: "Bilddenken und was den Gehalt der Bilder..." (Jaspers 1953, 620). The English edition of Jaspers translates *bildhafte Denken* as "pictorial thinking", with the second appearance as "pictorial thinking and its content." In my view, the more literal "pictorial thinking" is a better rendering of Jaspers, since in those pages Jaspers repeatedly uses some form of the term "Bild" (picture) at various points. Knowing that German is a language that normally does not leave such things to chance, the fact that Jaspers uses "Symbolik" and "symbolhaft" elsewhere in the same discussion indicates to me that he intentionally chose terms around *Bildhaft* ("pictorial")

⁴ De Martino's daughter Lia once told me that he had taught himself German.

⁵ Anthropologist Pietro Clemente told me that as a student, he and another classmate were enraptured by De Martino's "per entro" and imitated it in their own speech.

rather than “symbolic”. I suspect that De Martino’s own choice of “symbolic” was a device aimed, consciously or unconsciously, to better align Jaspers’s thought with his own profound focus on symbols, in *La fine del mondo* as throughout his oeuvre.

Another discrepancy I found between the original German and De Martino’s Italian has to do with his application of religious phenomenology to a psychiatric case he examines. Based on his readings of religious historian Rudolf Otto’s phenomenological approach, in many of his writings De Martino regularly cited Otto’s expression of “ganz Andere”, which refers to experience of the radical alterity of the sacred. In *La fine del mondo*, he sometimes translates this in Italian as “tutt’altro”, but most of the time he leaves it in German; I have translated this expression as “wholly other.” *Ganz Andere* recurs very frequently throughout the book, but especially in Chapter 2, which deals with psychopathological apocalypse and in which De Martino reviews material from various phenomenological psychiatrists; here, “ganz Andere” appears several times with reference to the experience of *Unheimlichkeit* [uncanniness]. De Martino recounts one case from Wetzel’s research, that of a young postal worker, and he writes: “Il fratello torna a casa, era *ganz andere* rispetto a prima.” Here, once again, De Martino does not cite Wetzel exactly, but instead paraphrases him. Moreover, Wetzel’s original reads that the brother was “ganz anders als früher”. This *ganz anders* (“very different from before”) is actually not the same thing as Otto’s *ganz Andere*, but the fact that De Martino decided to leave it in German in this way creates a slippage with the other places where he or other authors are making direct reference to Otto’s expression. I suggest that in a subtle way, this helps reinforce his application of religious phenomenological thinking to psychiatric phenomenology.

Demartinian neologisms

De Martino’s manner of appropriating other people’s speech and accenting it with his own is characteristic of his engagement with various authors he cites, at least in the moments when he is not using them as sparring partners. Where I have found this to have some significance, I have noted it for the reader. The neologisms he creates, in *La fine del mondo* as in his other works, constitute an important challenge for translation of a different order. As Marcello Massenzio said to me in one of our numerous exchanges, De Martino is creating a discipline that reinvents religious-historical theory, and correspondingly he is attempting to create a lexicon that is suited to this discipline (personal communication). For example, we have demartinian terms like *ierogonico*, for which I provided a very close translation by simply anglicizing it as “hierogonic”, seeing as it draws on root words from Ancient Greek, *iero* (sacred) and *gonia* (genesis). Massenzio noted that this choice on De Martino’s part was very significant, because it marked one of the most important points of divergence from Mircea Eliade’s conception of the sacred: for De Martino, the sacred exists as a product of history. Similarly, I used

“theogenetic” (2023, 168) for *teogenetico* (2019, 309), De Martino’s expression for being of divine origin. I rendered his formulation “i limiti del cosmificato e del cosmificabile” (De Martino 2019, 131) as “the limits of the ordered and orderable” (De Martino 2023, 41). Here, he again uses a Greek root (*cosmos*) to signal the intervention of culture as ordering in the process of world-making.

One of the most fundamental neologisms in De Martino’s entire theoretical apparatus is *destorificazione*, which in previous translations I had already chosen to translate “dehistorification” (Zinn 2015), although another contender was “dehistoricization”. The matter was further complicated by the fact that De Martino himself (2019, 147) uses *destorizzazione* twice in *La fine del mondo* (but not *destoricizzazione*). I opted for “dehistorification” because its unusual sound better communicated the novel quality of De Martino’s theory of ritual dehistorification, whereas “dehistoricization” carries established usages in English that might have risked creating ambiguities with De Martino’s thought. Less problematic for translation, but nonetheless opaque to readers unfamiliar with De Martino, is his *ethos del trascendimento*, often appearing as *ethos trascendentale del trascendimento* or the even more baroque formulation *ethos trascendentale del trascendimento della vita nel valore* (value that he specifies, by the way, as *intersoggettivo*). For all of these I followed my general approach of close, literal translation.

Among De Martino’s neologisms in *La fine del mondo*, the ones that posed the greatest challenge were undoubtedly *appaesato* and its cognate *appaesamento*, which lie in contrast to the established non-neologisms *spaesato* and *spaesamento*. This was a problem that compelled my rumination for many months on end. Whereas *spaesato* is connected to the negative *unheimlich* (routinely translated in English, with reference to Freud, as “uncanny”), De Martino’s innovative contribution was to create a term to reflect a positive condition and process. In some places, De Martino glosses *unheimlich* as *non familiare o spaesato*. In his intellectual biography of De Martino, Flavio Geissshuesler (2021) translates *appaesamento* as “territorialization”, which captures the aspect connected to land (*paese*), and yet I did not find it sufficiently convincing. I considered something more in terms of “at home”, but it was difficult to shift this to other parts of speech. Some solutions I came up with (at-homeness? homeliness? homeification?⁶) were terribly clumsy, and they did not lend themselves to capturing the different scales that *paese* embraces in Italian, ranging from local to national levels. As noted above, in at least one instance De Martino translates the German *daheim* [at home] as *appaesato* (2019, 99). On the other hand, although *heimlich* and *Heimlichkeit* capture the dimension of the familiar and domesticity, they could not offer a helpful analogy for

⁶ From his work on migration, Italian sociologist Paolo Boccagni has popularized the concept of “homing”, which could have been a related possible alternative, but like its cognates it seemed unwieldy to adapt in this context.

English as a positive contrast to *unheimlich*: “canny” and “canniness” simply do not stand in opposition to “uncanny”.

The contrasting pair to *appaesato/appaesamento* is *spaesato/spaesamento*, which Geishuessler coherently translates as “deterritorialization.” Now, *spaesato* is a translation of Heidegger’s *Unheimlichkeit* (“uncanniness”, translated in Italian with reference to Freudian thought as *perturbante*), but De Martino also translates *Unheimlich* elsewhere as *non familiare*, and even *alterità* and *stranezza* (cf. De Martino 2019, 170 n.10). For example, he translates *unheimliches Gefühl* (2019, 172) as “un sentimento non familiare”.

So, the question I faced was how to best juggle these various balls in translation. The solution I finally developed for this problem was to enlist for the task two pairs that could capture the neat linguistic contrast in Italian of *appaesato/appaesamento* and *spaesato/spaesamento*, and at the same time, connote a relationship to territory: the pairs I chose were “settled/settling” and “unsettled/unsettling”. Although it is true that “settled/settling” does not quite grasp some of the domestic resonances that De Martino’s *appaesato* suggests, it nonetheless connects a subject to a space, while “unsettled/unsettling” effectively suggests the feeling of *Unheimlich*’s uncanniness, and at the same time, a disconnect from a space. Incidentally, speaking of such connections to home, I should mention that De Martino has some key passages in which he discusses *patria culturale*, which I have translated as “cultural homeland”. I never really had much doubt about this, but when I mentioned “cultural homeland” in the proposal for The University of Chicago Press, one anonymous reviewer reacted nervously, concerned that it could somehow suggest something more along the lines of German *Heimat*, with all of the problematic baggage that this latter term carries in German culture.

Translating philosophical terms

If *La fine del mondo* was such a great challenge, this was surely due to the fact that it is De Martino’s most philosophical work, engaging existentialist and phenomenological philosophy throughout and embracing part of his *Scritti filosofici* (published by Roberto Pàstina: De Martino 2005b). Although I had a strong familiarity with De Martino’s special vocabulary and had dealt with this peculiar terminology before in my previous translations, *La fine del mondo* took me far outside of my comfort zone with its philosophical language. Admittedly, I do not have a strong scholarly background in philosophy, and at times this would lead me to various “crises of presence”, as when I would come across some word or expression that I suspected was ready to treacherously jeopardize my work, like a land mine lying in wait in the text. This is where my colleagues’ support was especially precious. For example, on p. 429 (and *passim*) of the 2019 Italian edition, De Martino uses *sicurezza* repeatedly. Because this could have various translations in English, I asked Marcello Massenzio for his opinion on how it was used

here, and once again, he opened up new interpretations for me. *Securitas*, said Marcello, referred to the domesticity of the familiar world: “io sto al sicuro” (I am in a safe place). In De Martino’s perspective, he argued, one must be faithful to one’s own cultural tradition, one’s “home”, faithful to the foundational values of one’s being-in-the-world is related to faithfulness to one’s tradition. Furthermore, Marcello highlighted this point as being central to De Martino’s polemic with Sartre, for De Martino held innovation in a dialectical relation to tradition. The passage featuring *sicurezza* (2023, 243) is one of the few places where I placed the original Italian in parentheses, in order to highlight the productive tension of translating the term as both “sureties” and “security”.

At other times, the philosophical questions were relatively minor. For example, *oltrepassare* is a term that De Martino uses very often in his discussions of the crisis of presence and transcendence. In English it could be translated in a number of ways, but I settled upon using “overcome” for the most part. The preponderance of my philosophy-related questions had to do with Heidegger: De Martino uses a language that clearly draws a great deal on Heidegger, but by no means is he deploying Heidegger’s vocabulary in a straightforward way. The underlying question of method was how to give readers a sense of the way in which De Martino gave his own inflection to a seemingly Heideggerian discourse. Once I came up with solutions for single terms and expressions, I turned to the devices of annotations and glossary entries for this purpose.

To approach this aspect of the project, I had to take a closer look at Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, the Italian and English translations of it, and various Heideggerian studies and glossaries (among these, Gorner 2007; Munday 2009; Schalow and Denker 2010). For the Italian edition of Heidegger, I utilized the Pietro Chiodi translation that De Martino would have had present, which also contained several useful comments on Heidegger’s vocabulary. On the other hand, I found that De Martino does not always adopt Chiodi’s terminology. Then there were other philosophical works that I had to study, whether consulted by De Martino (e.g. Croce, Paci, Sartre) or exegeses of his work (e.g. Cherchi 1994; Cherchi and Cherchi 1987; Berardini 2013; Berardini 2018; Berardini and Maraffa 2016). Additionally, it was useful to consult De Martino’s own *Scritti Filosofici* (2005), mentioned above. While I was engaged in this task, I was able to avail myself of the generous support of Sergio Fabio Berardini, who patiently replied to my queries and gave me feedback on my translation choices.

I developed a long list of terms that were most closely related to Heidegger’s thought, and I had to ponder each and every one of these at length. For the most part, I found that my preferences in English gravitated to the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 1962), although Joan Stambaugh’s subsequent translation (Heidegger 1996) was of great interest and helped me to develop some specific solutions. One question that I resolved quickly was *angoscia*, a key term that appears abundantly in *La fine del mondo*, but also in other works by De Martino. It seemed to me that the actual phenomenon that De Martino describes could better be rendered with “anguish”.

Instead, I opted for “anxiety” throughout, because that is the standard English translation of *Angst* in Heidegger: my consultations with Italian scholars made it clear that the Heideggerian dimension needed to be privileged here. Another example is De Martino’s frequent use of *dischiudere*, which could lend itself, in a more literary translation, to various (and perhaps more elegant) solutions. However, we would risk overlooking affinities with Heidegger’s “disclosedness” (*Erschlossenheit*) if we strayed too far from a literal translation in this case. For this reason, I stayed close to forms like “disclose” and “disclosure” in English. Especially in Chapter 7 (Antropologia e filosofia), De Martino uses a constellation of words around the root of *progetto*: *progettabile*, *progettualità*, *progettabilità* and *progettazione*. I struggled with these due to their awkwardness in English. Once again, it is important to keep in mind that all of these make implicit reference to Heidegger’s *Entwurf/Entwerfen*. So despite the awkwardness, I used various cognate words in English that include “project”: “projectable”, “projectability”, “projecting”, “projection”.

As with *progetto*, we also find a cluster of terms in the book with *mondo* as a root: *mondano*, *mondanità*, *demondanizzazione*, and these are largely connected to Heidegger’s complex use of words connected to the lexeme “world”: *Welt*, *Weltheit*, *weltbildend*. I translated *mondano* as “worldly” in order to capture the Heideggerian connection, where appropriate; in some cases, however, De Martino uses the word with the meaning of “secular”. For *mondanità* —which De Martino almost always uses rather than Chiodi’s canonical *mondità*— I preferred Macquarrie and Robinson translation with “worldhood”, whereas Stambaugh uses “worldliness”. *Demondanizzazione* is De Martino’s translation of *Entweltlichung*, a key term in his discussions of crisis of presence, and with this choice De Martino distances himself from Chiodi’s *demondificazione*. Macquarrie and Robinson (Heidegger 1962, 147) gloss *Entweltlichung* as “deprive of its worldhood”, and in this case I preferred Stambaugh’s “de-worlding” (without the hyphen). More straightforward are De Martino’s use of Heideggerian terms *intramondano* (*Innerwelt* – Macquarrie and Robinson’s “within-the-world”), and *ente intramondano* (“entity within-the-world”). For Heidegger’s *Seinkönnen* (De Martino’s *poter esserci*), I preferred Stambaugh’s “potentiality-of-being” rather than Macquarrie and Robinson’s “potentiality-for-being.” Another phrase in *La fine del mondo* that is a mouthful is “dover esserci nel mondo”. Here, I agreed with Flavio Geissshuesler’s translation of “duty-to-be-in-the-world”, which complements Heidegger’s *Seinsollen* with a *Seinmüssen*, a point that he must have taken from Storch and Kulenkampff (1950), but which also fits in well with his Crocean ethics.

De Martino’s frequent use of *utilizzabile* and *utilizzazione* posed a substantial stumbling block for my translation. Here, too, De Martino is casting a sideward glance at a cluster of Heideggerian expressions: *zuhanden*, *Zuhandenheit*, *Zuhandenes*. Pietro Chiodi renders *Zuhandenheit* as *utilizzabilità*, *zuhanden* as *utilizzante*. For Heidegger in English, the classic translation by Macquarrie and Robinson gives us “ready-to-hand” for

zuhanden and “readiness-to-hand” for *Zuhandenheit*. Gorner (2007), on the other hand (but losing the “hand”), proposes “available” and “availableness”. In this case, I found Stambaugh’s translations to be less awkward for De Martino’s repeated deployment of this constellation of terms: “thing at hand” for *Zuhandenes*, and *Zuhandenheit* rendered with “handiness.” At times, De Martino even speaks of “utilizzazioni” in a plural form that does not appear in Heidegger; I simply translated this as “handinesses”. Interestingly, I found *utilizzabile* in De Martino’s translation of Sartre’s *L’être et le néant*, where the English edition of Sartre I consulted (Sartre 1956) uses “instrumental”. Likewise, De Martino translates Sartre elsewhere with “utilizzabilità”, where the English translation of Sartre speaks of “instrumentality”. All of this discussion of *utilizzabile* and *utilizzazione* in De Martino should not be confused with his treatment of *utile*, which is instead a reference to Benedetto Croce’s conception of the economic sphere: the influence of Croce in De Martino’s thought posed another problem for translation. Where De Martino often refers to *opera* and *operare*, I decided to use “action” as a way of giving a nod to Croce. A related, but difficult term that recurs is *l’operabile*, which Geissshuesler (2021) has translated as “the workable”. I instead opted for “the practicable” and “practicability”, because for me this seemed to better point to agency.

Playing gossip

It remains to be seen what the effect of the English translation of *La fine del mondo* will be, with review and dissemination times being rather lengthy in the humanities. To a greater extent than other works by De Martino, it may well attract exegetes who are not familiar with Italian or his other writings. As noted above, the publisher’s editor purposely wanted to leave readers to their own devices in interpreting the book. Given its short essays and commentaries, but also its unpolished quality, I have often compared *The End of the World* to Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*: both texts present themselves as treasure troves that can tempt interpretation the way people parse Quranic suras or Biblical passages. Yet I am cognizant of the risks involved with this, since some Italian colleagues have problematized the reception of Gramsci in the anglophone world. They simply do not agree with the way Gramsci is being used. The question is whether something along the same lines will happen with De Martino: will the De Martino that gets spread through translation return home as something unrecognizable or deemed illegitimate? In a way, this is a version of the game of gossip that we used to play as children, sitting in a circle and spreading a message in a chain, except that we would laugh at the inevitably messed-up result. Undoubtedly there is an element of risk in the operation of translation, but then again, I see a great potential in allowing more scholars to get closer to De Martino’s work. For example, Michael Peters recently wrote an article inspired by De Martino’s notion of “cultural apocalypse” (Peters et al. 2023). He did not have the benefit of being able to read De Martino directly but could only draw on

discussions of De Martino in French and English. It seems to me that scholars having to rely exclusively on second-hand treatments leads to a state of affairs that is much more akin to the gossip game than allowing them direct access will.

But when does the gossip game become bona fide “fake news”, to mention an element that has been destabilizing our contemporary being-in-the-world? Individually and collectively, we human beings are facing a great number of challenges. Of the several works by De Martino that colleagues have urged me to translate, I settled on *La fine del mondo* precisely because it speaks so well to our Zeitgeist. And in no small way, for me personally this play through translation has been therapeutic —we might conceive of it as a sort of ludotherapy. I had already had the experience with *The Land of Remorse*: translating 400 pages on spiders cured me of an arachnophobia that plagued me from childhood. This is not to say that I’ve been “cured” of apocalypse, but —perhaps like the scholars at Heidelberg’s Center for Apocalyptic Studies— this play has helped me to deal with the apocalyptic mood that characterizes so much of the present. The translation’s publication in 2023 coincided with a new apocalyptic threat beginning to seep into public awareness, one linked to the rise of artificial intelligence. Of course, artificial intelligence has vastly improved the capacity for automated translation, yet I have long believed that it will never be up to the task of translating Ernesto De Martino’s writing. The kinds of considerations I have presented throughout this article demonstrate the very human task of making meaning out of words. Nonetheless, I thought that it might be fun to close this discussion with a bit of play with AI, so I asked Chat GPT to provide translations for a few quotes from *La fine del mondo*, and I provide the results here along with my own versions from the English edition.

Example 1

Il dover esserci nel mondo culturale, il rischio di non poterci essere in nessun mondo culturale possibile: in questa tensione vive l’ethos primordiale della presentificazione. (De Martino 2019, 129)

The ought-to-be-there in the cultural world, the risk of not being able to be in any possible cultural world: in this tension lives the primordial ethos of presentation. (Chat GPT)

The duty-to-be in the cultural world, the risk of not being (*non poterci essere*) in any possible cultural world: the primordial ethos of presentification lives in this tension. (De Martino 2023, 39)

Example 2

Ma occorre precisare che, nella mia prospettiva, il mondo deve essere fondato proprio perché può perdere il fondamento; che il fondare il mondo significa valorizzare la vita non secondo l’essere, ma secondo distinti valori del dover essere; che di questa valorizzazione la testimonianza

inaugurale è data dal progetto comunitario dei un mondo utilizzabile, e che gli ulteriori trascendimenti sono dischiusi da questa valorizzazione inaugurale; che il rischio del crollo dell'ethos del trascendimento comporta il rischio del crollo dell'esserci nel mondo ... (De Martino 2019, 487)

But it must be clarified that, from my perspective, the world must be founded precisely because it can lose its foundation; that to found the world means to valorize life not according to being, but according to distinct values of ought-to-be; that the inaugural testimony of this valorization is given by the communal project of a usable world, and that further transcendences are opened up by this inaugural valorization; that the risk of the collapse of the ethos of transcendence entails the risk of the collapse of being-there in the world... (Chat GPT)

It is necessary to point out, however, that in my perspective the world must be founded precisely because it can lose its foundation; that founding the world means valorizing life not according to being but according to distinct values of the duty-to-be; that the initial evidence of this valorization is given by the communitarian project of an at-hand world, and that further transcendences are disclosed by this initial valorization; that the risk of the ethos of transcendence's collapse entails the risk of being-in-the-world's collapse (De Martino 2023, 281)

Example 3

Essere-nel-mondo come determinazione formale è insufficiente in quanto fa scomparire il doverci essere nel mondo mediante la valorizzazione intersoggettiva e il non poterci essere in nessun mondo possibile come rischio radicale. La mondità come mera possibilità di mondanizzazione, come semplice poter essere, non assicura, non fonda, il passaggio ai mondi culturali concreti, che non si appellano a un potere ma a un dovere. (De Martino 2019, 526)

Being-in-the-world as formal determination is insufficient as it makes the ought-to-be-there in the world disappear through intersubjective valorization and the not-being-able-to-be in any possible world as a radical risk. Worldliness as a mere possibility of world-making, as simple potential being, does not ensure, does not found, the transition to concrete cultural worlds, which do not appeal to a power but to a duty. (Chat GPT)

Being-in-the-world as a formal determination is insufficient in that it makes the duty-to-be-in-the-world through intersubjective valorization disappear and not be able to be in any world possible as a radical risk. Worldliness as a mere possibility of worlding, as a simple potentiality of being (*poter essere*) does not guarantee or ground the passage to concrete cultural worlds, which do not appeal to a potentiality but to a must (*dovere*). (De Martino 2023, 311)

The work produced by Chat GPT —in slightly longer time than it takes me to blink— is actually much better than I expected. Certainly, someone needs to give it some training in Heideggerian thought, and it is not clear to me how capable it might be of a more literary translation, should one prefer that; but for a first approach to the text it could be immensely helpful. To be honest, I was hoping to be able to brashly say, “3-0, human being vs. AI: Game Over”. Yet I need to be equally honest in conjecturing that AI

is not our bugaboo: instead, it will undoubtedly be enlisted more and more often in the future for this sort of translation. I do not see this as a necessarily apocalyptic scenario: computerized technologies have long been serving as playmates for many sorts of games, and AI has the potential to become a valuable partner in this one, but only on the condition that we do not give up our own being there. This is not only a matter of understanding philosophy or anthropology, as well as a certain style of Italian. From the experience I have related here with specific examples, it is clear that the translation of De Martino's writing still requires substantial input from very human decision-making.

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