

**The Politics of Translating Science Fiction.
An Analysis of Translated Anglo-American Science Fiction in Italy
(1950s - 1970s)**

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I, Diana Bianchi, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the translation of popular literature and socio-cultural practices and formations, explored through the case study of Anglo-American science fiction translated into Italian between the 1950s and 1970s. The thesis starts with an examination of how popular literature has been defined, arguing that its low cultural status has consequences in relation to its translation, both in terms of textual practices and social dynamics. It then moves on to consider the genre of science fiction (SF), focusing on its development in Italy and showing how translation and other types of rewriting (Lefevere, 1992a) played a role in constructing different images of the genre at different moments in the history of SF in Italy. Chapter II looks at the way in which science fiction was presented and interpreted by its first publishers, editors and critics during the 1950s. Chapter III examines the anthology of translated science fiction *Le meraviglie del possibile* (1959), arguing that the collection had a key role in starting a process of legitimization of the genre in Italy. Chapter IV and Chapter V focus on the production of science fiction in the troubled decade of the 1970s, looking at how new book-series and SF magazines used paratextual elements and translation to reconceptualise SF as proper literature and as a medium for social and political criticism. Informed by cultural and sociological approaches to the study of translation (Hermans, 1985, 1999; Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998; Wolf and Fukari, 2007) and using a variety of methodological tools (comparative textual analysis, paratextual analysis, multimodality), the thesis shows how the translation of science fiction in Italy became the symbolic terrain of a power struggle between different groups and individuals who used the genre to express their ideas about society, literature and politics.

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List of abbreviations

BA	– Back Translation
CA	– Cosmo Argento
CO	– Cosmo Oro
LMDP	– Le Meraviglie Del Possibile
SC	– Source Culture
SF	– Science Fiction
SL	– Source Language
ST	– Source Text
TC	– Target Culture
TL	– Target Language
TS	– Translation Studies
TT	– Target Text
UAU	– Un'Ambigua Utopia

*Imaginary futures are always, regardless of what the author might think,
about the day in which they're written*
(William Gibson, 2012)

INTRODUCTION

This thesis originated from my long-standing interest in popular literature and the way in which social and cultural attitudes may impact on its production and consumption. I consider popular fiction as a literature 'under surveillance' to highlight the way in which its texts are often scrutinized and 'controlled' by individuals, institutions and agencies with social and cultural authority. On the other hand, popular fiction can be a vehicle to contest and negotiate particular issues in a given context, especially in relation to those groups and individuals who occupy a marginal position in society.

Given the social implications of producing and reading popular literature, I began to wonder what happens when popular literature is translated. Since in most Western countries popular literature is considered as having a lower status compared with mainstream literature, it has to be asked to what extent this positioning affects its transfer, processing and reception in a given cultural space. How do social agents deal with genres that often have a social stigma? Which strategies are adopted by the mediators to make a popular genre acceptable in the receiving culture? Which specific problems exist, if any, when translating a popular genre? These are only some of the questions that can be asked.

I am interested in exploring these issues in relation to different genres, however, for this particular project I chose to focus on science fiction because the circulation of this genre in Italy took place almost entirely in a mediated form. Science fiction as a standalone genre was introduced in the country in the early 1950s in the form of translations from, mainly, Anglo-American sources, and continued to be perceived as a 'foreign' genre' for a long time. Ignored by critics because of its low status in the Italian literary system, the few critical contributions produced until a decade ago focused either on the limited SF literature in Italian or on the Anglo-American texts, without clarifying whether the study was conducted on the originals or on their Italian translation.

This neglect is not surprising as the marginalisation of translated literature by the cultural establishment has characterised the field of literary studies for a long time and has affected both canonical and popular texts (Hermans, 1985:7-8). The rise of Translation Studies (TS) has, however, changed this state of affairs and, since the 1980s, the study of translation has come to the fore as a discipline in its own right where translation is seen “as a cultural and historical phenomenon” (Hermans, 1999:5), and where it is important “to explore its context and its conditioning factors, to search for grounds that can explain why there is what there is” (*Ibid.*). In this new paradigm translation is seen as an encounter between cultures rather than the transfer of grammatical structures and lexis from one language into another. Thus, the particular shape that translations take in the new environment is not so much, or not solely, the result of linguistic constraints but rather by differences between the value systems of the source culture and the target culture.

Further developments have highlighted different aspects of the relationship between translation and culture, for example the power of the various agents and institutions in controlling what is translated, when and how, and the influence of their ideological stance on the texts that emerge from such activities (Lefevere, 1992a). More recently, a sociological component has been developed in order to gain a better understanding of translation as a social practice, foregrounding “the relations of power underlying the process of translation in its various stages” (Wolf, 2010:341) and emphasizing “the importance of translations’ and translators’ role in society” (*Ibid.*).

The concept of translation as an encounter between cultures, embedded in the social milieu in which it takes place, reflecting the ideology of the social agents involved in its production, is also central to this project. Through an analysis of translation and other forms of “rewriting” (Lefevere, 1992a:8-9), such as critical essays and anthologies, this project aims to identify which image of science fiction was construed by the social agents involved in its dissemination in Italy during the time under consideration. In particular, the relationship between contextual factors and publishers’, editors’ and translators’ activities will be highlighted, showing that the way in which these mediators “understand themselves and their culture is one

of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate” (Lefevere, 1992b:14).

The project was initially focused on the study of translated science fiction published in the 1970s, for two reasons. This decade saw a remarkable increase in the number of SF books published in Italy, a veritable science fiction ‘boom’ as SF writer and critic Vittorio Curtoni put it (1977:171). New publishers, specialized in SF, launched new, sophisticated hardbook-series, while generalist publishers launched their own SF series. According to statistics drawn by Ernesto Vegetti et al. (2009), the volume of SF published doubled compared with the previous and following decades and, as in the past, they consisted mostly of translations. The second reason was connected to the historical moment in which this rapid growth of SF took place as the 1970s was also the decade of the “Anni di piombo” [Years of Lead] that is to say a period of social unrest and widespread political violence engendering a climate of fear and oppression in the country. I wanted to discover whether this remarkable increase of published science fiction could be related to the specific social, cultural and historical context of the time and whether these aspects affected translation and, if so, in what way.

As the project developed I expanded the time span to the study of science fiction in the previous decades to better understand and contextualize the events in the 1970s. I thus included an examination of the science fiction published in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing respectively on the popular SF book series *Urania* and on a famous anthology of translated science fiction, *Le meraviglie del possibile*, published by Einaudi in 1959, which I came to realize played a key role in the way SF developed in the following years.

This expansion also led me to consider the connection between the introduction and development of science fiction and the forms of popular fiction that were already established. As a number of scholars have highlighted, there had been a lively circulation of many popular magazines dedicated to travels and adventures in Italy since the late nineteenth century, with stories dealing with a fantastic, gothic or futuristic content (Foni, 2014:16). In addition, the works of many writers who pioneered the most important popular genres had also been translated into Italian

between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, in particular H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and H. Rider Haggard (De Turris, 2014:43). Crime fiction was also well known, as the first book series completely devoted to the genre, called “I gialli”, had been published by Mondadori as early as 1929. Thus, as Antonello states, there wasn’t a “«vuoto» immaginativo” [empty imagination] (Antonello, 2008:105) when science fiction arrived in Italy. In the thesis, these antecedents will be taken into consideration as possible providers of familiar frames of reference for both mediators and readers, although such links were never explicitly acknowledged by the mediators. As we shall see, in later years these frames of reference were either ignored or toned down as SF became more established as a genre and clear distinctions were made between SF and other popular texts.

It is important to note that the three decades that saw the publication of the science fiction examined in this thesis were crucial periods in the history of Italy, from an economic, social and political point of view. It is also worth pointing out, for example, that the arrival of SF in Italy in the 1950s coincided with the years of reconstruction when, thanks to the Marshall Plan¹, the Italian economy was able to restart (Ginsborg, 1990:78-79) and begin the extraordinary process of structural and social transformations later known as the ‘economic miracle’, that would radically change the features of the country (Cento Bull, 2001:55). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, rural Italian economy rapidly changed into an industrial one, leading to the migration of large groups of people from Southern Italy to the North, where most factories were located. While rapid urbanization and labour exploitation initially resulted in marginalisation and degradation (Ferroni, 1991:346), living conditions gradually improved and mass consumerism grew as well as new models of life, especially in the Northern regions.

This economic growth led to increasing prosperity but also anxieties about the way in which the country was changing and old ways of life were disappearing. The wave of consumerism, which also included mass cultural products, caused much concern among intellectuals, particularly those close to left-wing parties, and saw

¹ The Marshall Plan is the name given to the American programme of financial aid aimed at the recovery of European countries after the end of World War II.

mass cultural products as forms of 'escapism', representing "capitalist values" (see Forgacs, 1990:103-105). This hostility, however, was only partly based on political convictions. As will be discussed in Chapter II, most Italian intellectuals understood culture in terms of 'high art' and rejected forms that were perceived as 'debased', be they Hollywood films or popular fiction genres. Defined as 'cultura di massa' [mass culture], imported cultural forms such as science fiction and other popular genres were also seen in opposition to 'cultura popolare' [popular culture], which was considered as people's 'authentic' culture (*ibid.*), since this equated with 'folklore' and other traditional forms of knowledge and leisure activities. This contrast was particularly strong in the post-war years when, following the publication of Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere* (1948-1951) and the pioneering work on folklore studies by Ernesto de Martino, there was a reappraisal of peasant cultures (Forgacs and Lumley, 1996:4-5).

It was only in the early 1960s that some isolated voices started looking at mass cultural forms in a more positive way, advocating the need to critically examine the products that were by then part of the life for many Italians. It is worth mentioning that one of the most important figures in this context was Umberto Eco, whose analysis of popular culture (1964; 1977) produced landmark studies both in terms of offering a critical approach and establishing a field of study.

By the 1970s, mass culture had become more widely accepted and studied, particularly in relation to certain genres, although a view of mass culture as "inauthentic and as bringing about the commodification of all cultural life" was still lingering, especially on the left (Forgacs and Lumley, 1996:6). This attitude is somewhat surprising considering that the 1970s saw the emergence of strong counter-cultural movements (*ibid.*) protesting against all forms of institutional authority, including cultural ones (Lumley, 1990:119-120). As a matter of fact, some popular forms and practices became more acceptable, particularly after being adapted, as Lumley says, to "Italian conditions", which meant making them more "politically left-wing" (Lumley, 1990:297). As we shall see, this was also the case of science fiction which, while continuing to be disseminated as 'entertainment' through popular series such as Mondadori's *Urania*, was also given a political

reading by some groups and individuals who combined fandom activities with politics.

- Methodology

As highlighted in the previous sections, my investigation took into account different types of documents, as I looked at translated texts, critical pieces and paratexts. More often than not, these documents were part of larger artefacts, with their own rules and conventions in terms of the arrangement of the various objects they were composed of: the translated texts appeared in anthologies or in magazines, containers characterized by multiple voices and texts.

This variety called for a range of methods to gather the required data. In relation to translations, I used a descriptive approach (Toury, 1995) whereby source texts and target texts have been compared and *ad hoc* segments selected to identify recurring patterns. This method, however, cannot be applied when comparing a large quantity of data. The description of translations, even when limited to a selection of significant segments and chosen in relation to the research purposes (Tymoczko, 2002:16-17), can be a laborious and time-consuming enterprise, overwhelming if dealing with a great number of texts as was the case with the analysis of entire book-series.

For this reason, in dealing with book-series, my object of study in Chapter II and Chapter IV, I limited my analysis to the paratexts, an approach that has been increasingly used in TS during the last decade (Pellatt, 2013:1). Pioneered by Urpo Kovala (1996) and further developed by Tahir-Gürçağlar (2002), the analysis of paratexts draws its terminology and conceptual tools from Genette's seminal study of paratexts (1997) and can be very productive in shedding light on how a foreign author, text or even a whole genre is perceived within a new cultural context. Precisely because of their usefulness in providing information about editorial policies, I have employed paratextual analyses also in those chapters centred on comparative textual analysis of translation, as a way of obtaining additional data on the mediators' stance about the texts.

While the analysis of paratexts has been used for all the material discussed in the thesis, I have provided a more in-depth analysis in Chapter IV, where I combined Genette's framework with the conceptual tools of Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (2006) as these offered a way of interpreting the meaning of the visual elements on book covers.

- Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a review of the literature about popular fiction and discusses how different terms and approaches to the study of popular genres have been employed, insofar as how they reflect chronological, disciplinary and ideological positions. While there clearly cannot be 'objective' ways to refer to popular fiction or 'objective' approaches, the field appears to be characterized by a certain lack of stability, as the notion of what is 'popular' changes in time and 'popular genres' may occupy different places in the cultural system of a country in different periods. These issues and others are then examined in relation to translated popular fiction, through an analysis of the literature available on the topic (mostly case studies). The last sections of this chapter deal with the genre of science fiction, its definition and its translation.

The second chapter provides an overview of the introduction of science fiction in Italy, looking at how the first mediators approached the task of introducing science fiction as a new genre into the Italian cultural space. It examines how paratextual elements and textual practices gave shape to the initial versions of science fiction in this 'new' setting. The chapter primarily focuses on the book-series *Urania*, published by Mondadori, and on the way in which its interpretation of science fiction was either followed or challenged by subsequent publishers. The chapter also looks at the first critical responses, particularly at the critic Sergio Solmi, who can be considered as one of the most influential figures in the history of Italian science fiction - thanks both to his critical insights and his role in devising the first Italian anthology of translated science fiction *Le meraviglie del possibile* (1959), which had a key role in offering a different and authoritative alternative model of interpreting and publishing science fiction. The anthology itself is the object of analysis in the third chapter, which is concerned with the description of the book's

innovative paratextual features and the translation of short stories. In this Chapter I argue that the anthology was an act of cultural planning where the selection of the texts, their arrangement in the collection and their translation into Italian all combine to involve readers in a discourse about the future, connected with anxieties about the transformations taking place in the country in the decade following the Second World War.

The fourth chapter examines the legitimizing strategies adopted by new publishers, specialized in science fiction, that launched new SF book series in the 1970s. Starting with a discussion about the translation of selected titles, the chapter shows how these titles had a range of functions: contributing to the construction of the publishers' identity; enhancing the 'literary' image of the books by adopting the entitling conventions of the target culture; and working in unison with the cover art in presenting a specific image of science fiction. The chapter also combines Genette's classic paratextual framework with conceptual tools drawn from Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of visual grammar (2006) to elucidate the arrangement of the visual and textual material on book covers.

The fifth chapter shows the interweaving of science fiction, politics and translation through an analysis of two SF magazines, *Robot* and *Un'Ambigua Utopia*, published in the second half of the 1970s and characterized by a clear left-wing political positioning. The chapter explores the relationship between the two magazines and their connection with the values and ideas of the youth social movements of the time. It chiefly focuses on the analysis of *Robot*, ranging from the construction of the magazine's identity to the wide-ranging issues it highlighted. The last section deals with the translation strategies adopted by the magazine, mainly explored through a comparative textual analysis of three translated short stories. The study shows how, despite a clear source-oriented strategy, significant shifts reveal the influence of socio-cultural elements in the translated stories and contextual elements, related to ideas and issues debated in society at the time.

As I stated earlier, for a long time the translation of science fiction has been a neglected area of study in Italy, although in the last decade there has been a growing interest in the topic, with a series of publications evidencing a comparative

perspective that have brought to the fore the mediated nature of the science fictional texts introduced to the country since the early 1950s. Pierpaolo Antonello (2008), for example, examined the “birth” of science fiction in Italy and the book-series *Urania*, comparing the different sociocultural and historical elements of the development of SF in Italy and the US, and highlighting the particular shape given to science fiction by *Urania*.

Antonello’s work was further developed by Giulia Iannuzzi. Her monograph on the development of science fiction in Italy (2014a) and her analysis of the translations published in the *Urania*’s series (2014b, 2018) have been an important point of reference in relation to my thesis. As a matter of fact, Iannuzzi’s monograph was published when I was midway through my project and, as a result, there are some overlapping elements - for instance, we both set our research in the decades between the 1950s and 1970s. Iannuzzi is especially concerned with the description and analysis of six key book series and magazines published in the above-mentioned time span. Two are also part of my investigation: the book series *Urania* and the magazine *Robot*. While there are some similarities in relation to the aspects we examine, there are also some key differences. Iannuzzi also works within a comparative framework and makes interesting observations about the translation practices adopted by the publishers, however she does not analyse translations in detail. I, on the other hand, specifically focus on the description of translations, particularly in relation to the magazine *Robot*.

- Notes

- Unless otherwise stated, the translations from Italian are my own.
- The research conducted for this project has led to some published work.
- The material in Chapter IV has been used for the article:

Bianchi, D. (2015) “Future Re-visions. The Construction of Generic Identity in the Italian Translated Titles of Anglo-American Science Fiction”. *Annali di Ca’ Foscari. Serie Occidentale*, vol. 49, p. 227-237.

- The material about women's science fiction in Chapter V has been further developed and published as:

Bianchi, D. (2018) "Dangerous Visions? The Circulation and Translation of Women's Crime Fiction and Science Fiction. *Perspectives*. Vol. 26(6).

CHAPTER I

DEFINING AND TRANSLATING POPULAR LITERATURE

1. Introduction

In his “Introduction” to the anthology *Best Science Fiction for 1972*, the editor and SF writer Frederik Pohl stated that “Translating a science fiction story is almost like translating a poem: you don’t so much put it into another language as you recreate it from scratch” (Pohl, quoted in Mamatas, 2010). This statement is striking for two reasons. The first is that it deals with the topic of translating science fiction, a popular genre that is not usually the object of critical commentary regarding its translation. The second is that in describing the problems of translating science fiction, Pohl compares it to poetry, that is to say, a form that many consider the pinnacle of literary achievement and, as such, inhabiting a rather different critical universe. Frederik Pohl’s simile was prompted by the inclusion of a translated short story by Japanese author Ryu Mitsuse² in the anthology - a story that, as Pohl explains, had been quite difficult to translate. In fact, the inclusion of a non-English story in an English SF anthology was in itself unusual, as the Anglo-American SF world had not generally shown much interest in foreign science fiction (Ashley, 2007:393). Pohl’s statement is a useful introduction to some of the issues that will be discussed in this chapter, namely science fiction’s difficult relationship with mainstream and canonical literature, its cultural specificity as the genre is mostly perceived as having an Anglo-American origin and, especially, the problems of its translation.

As one of the recognized popular genres (Gelder, 2004; McCracken, 1998), the textual and critical practices that characterise science fiction’s production and consumption are, to an extent, the same as for other popular texts. For this reason, in this chapter, I have widened the scope of my analysis to the general field of

² The short story by Ryu Mitsuse (1928-1999) included in Frederick Pohl’s anthology was “The Sunset, 2217 A.D.”, a story part of a wider series called *The Space Chronicles*.

popular literature, starting with a review of what “popular literature” is, how it has been defined and what saying that a text belongs to this type of cultural production implies. Equally important, I will examine what it means to translate a “popular text” since, as I will show, popular literature is usually characterised by derogatory judgements and is generally considered not worthy of critical examination (Gelder, 2004:11-39). I will argue that the translation of texts that are placed within this category has significant social repercussions and that such translations will impact on the identity and cultural position of the agents responsible for the translation, in the same way that the “cultural capital”³ of the mediators may have repercussions on the social status of the works. Translating texts that are deemed ‘inferior’ may be perceived as diminishing the social status of the agents of translation and this may entail strategies to try and attenuate the social effects of such activities or, alternatively, may bring the agents to challenge dominant cultural hierarchies. The social aspects of writing or engaging in activities aimed at the dissemination of popular literature, such as importing and translating it, have received little attention from scholars. While there has not been a great deal of research about the translation of popular literature (Carter, 2018:431), what is available indicates that social factors play an important role in the translation of popular texts. Consequently, questions investigating the social circumstances that bring publishers, writers and translators to engage with a type of cultural production often perceived as having a social stigma seem crucial, if we are to understand the strategies adopted by the mediating agents.

In the next sections I will look at the way in which popular literature has been defined since its emergence in the nineteenth century, starting with an examination of the terms adopted⁴. I will then focus on the translation of popular texts, highlighting the elements uncovered by research into this topic. In the final part I will focus on science fiction, starting with a brief account of its history and definition and then looking at its translation through a discussion of specific case studies.

³ The notion of “cultural capital” is a form of “symbolic capital” used by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the circulation of cultural products and the knowledge of the codes to consume them. (Thwaites et al, 1994:190).

⁴ Since this research takes place within the Italian and Anglo-Saxon literary and cultural traditions, the discussion will be limited to the contributions made in these areas.

1.2 Defining popular literature

The many problems that affect the attempt to define and describe “popular literature” even include a terminological ambiguity of the expression itself and have not been helped by the confusion generated by the multiple competing expressions that have been used to refer to the same cultural objects throughout the twentieth century. To an extent, these expressions show similarities among different literary cultures, with certain terms having been favoured over other ones at different times and in different contexts. Laura Ricci, for example, in a study about the stylistic features of popular genres, lists a whole series of “labels” used in Italy to refer to such texts, including “letteratura di massa, best seller, *Trivialliteratur*, kitsch” [mass literature, best seller, *Trivialliteratur*, kitsch”] (Ricci, 2013:11).

In addition, discussions about popular literature have often been framed within the wider field of “popular culture” (Glover and McCracken, 2012:6), another term that is, if anything, even less clear⁵ and has produced a number of definitions, often contradictory, always “in contrast to other conceptual categories” (Storey, 2006:1).

“Popular literature” is often defined in relation to an “*absent other*” as the label is generally used to refer to texts that are thought of as the opposite of “serious” or “canonical” literature - the latter being “a list of works set apart from other literature by virtue of their literary quality and importance” (Hawthorn, 1994:17). In this sense, popular literature is often defined by what it is not. In Hawthorn’s entry there is also a brief mention of “paraliterature” - one of the synonyms or competing terms of popular literature - and this is explained as “work which is seen to be ‘literary’ in a broad sense but non-canonical” (*Ibid.*). This definition appears to be rather non-committal as it does not account for the negative connotations that are usually attached to terms such as “paraliterature” or “popular literature”. The following definition of “popular literature” from the online edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* exemplifies the set of values accompanying such labels and shows how they do not just identify a particular type of works, but are ideologically loaded

⁵ The term dates back to the end of the eighteenth century to refer to cultural forms associated with “common people” such as songs, proverbs and plays etc. (Burke, 1981:216) but it later acquired a more negative connotation when it started to be used to refer to the cultural forms produced within a market economy and through industrial means of production (cf. Waites et al, 1982:15).

Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Popular literature, unlike high literature, generally does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure.⁶

The traits used to define popular literature in relation to “artistic” literature or canonical literature, show the typical set of binary oppositions that are normally used to characterise texts defined as “popular”: entertainment vs education, craft vs art, ephemeral vs enduring, mass readership vs elite readers. The above definition highlights how the notion of popular literature does not depend on self-evident traits but elements of a network that define the objects “popular” and “canonical” in relation to each other (cf. Gelder, 2004:11). In addition, this dichotomy is not stable and, as will be discussed in the section below, the objects contained within the categories of “popular” and “canonical” undergo variation over time.

Further problems arise when we look at the word “popular” which, from a semantic point of view, is rather ambiguous (Williams, 1983; Hall, 1981). Raymond Williams, in particular, traces the development of the word and notices how the phrase “popular culture” has acquired a number of meanings, both positive and negative, from “inferior kinds of work” and “work deliberately setting out to win favour”, to something “well-liked by many people” and “culture made by people for themselves” (Williams, 1983: 236-38). This means that to define a text as “popular” may be, depending on the context, a statement about its aesthetic quality, its function, a reference to the degree of appreciation it enjoys, or relate to a community’s cultural practices.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration is how the various terms used to define the same texts have a specific connotation, generally associated with particular historical periods and theories. Popular literature competes not only with “paraliterature” but also with “mass literature”, a term that was particularly favoured

⁶ Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/470242/popular-literature> (Last accessed: 28/06/2015).

in earlier decades and which, together with “mass culture” was used to define the new cultural forms, often deriving from America, industrially-produced and designed for large consumption. While they all seem to refer to the same body of works, “mass literature” and “paraliterature” have clear pejorative connotations. The term “mass literature” evokes the idea of passive receivers of large-scale cultural goods, while “paraliterature”, by way of the Greek prefix “para” (next), even denies the status of “literature” to the texts included in this category.

Works published in the last decade in the area of popular literature favour the term “popular fiction” which is used in the book titles (Gelder, 2004; Glover and McCracken, 2012; Berberich, 2014; Murphy, 2017). Ken Gelder explains this choice on the grounds that novels dominate the area and argues that the term is less “porous” than other alternatives (2004:3). While this is generally true⁷ it must be pointed out that the term “fiction” is in itself not exempt from a certain ambiguity as it is also employed to refer to film and TV narratives (see for example Tony Bennett and Graham Martin, who use the term “popular fictions” to refer to literary, filmic and televisual products, 1990:ii).

The terminological problems that affect popular literature are partially reflected in what is often referred to as its opposite, i.e. the corpus of texts defined as “serious” or “canonical literature”. Here too a number of synonyms exist, such as “high literature” or “artistic literature”, as in the above definition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. A more neutral term is the word “mainstream”, especially used within the science fiction community to refer to non-genre narratives. Although “canonical literature” is generally taken to refer to those literary works that have been especially selected within a culture because of their “quality” and “universal values”, this view has been challenged in the last decades. This is because the “canon” in literature has started to be seen as a product of history; a construct, “fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time” (Eagleton, 1983:11). Therefore, both categories of “popular” and “canonical” are slippery and unstable concepts, as texts that may be seen as belonging to one category at some

⁷ Novels certainly represent the majority of publications in recent decades, but it must be noted that short-stories are also a preferred choice in some genres. This is the case of science fiction where the short story is not only still a popular form, but it was the main form of publication until the 1950s.

point in history may shift to another position at a different time. A suitable example of such 'journeys', which can be made in both directions, is represented by John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). In the seventeenth century this text was very popular and accessible to most people with a basic knowledge of Christian principles, whereas now it is a product of high culture (Bordoni, 1993:45). On the other hand, texts may also travel from the 'popular' field to a higher position, as Jim Thompson's crime novels which, as Glover and McCracken note, acquired a cult following a few decades after their publication (Glover and McCracken, 2012:7). Consequently, notions of what is popular and what is canonical are continuously re-adjusted and literary works are re-positioned in different times and societies. While the items contained within each area may change in time and their hierarchy may shift, what does not change is the need for a body of work that is presented as "popular" and against which canonical literature is construed (Bordoni, 1993:45). In this respect, translation may further contribute to the re-positioning of these categories, as a corpus of texts or genre may shift into another position when imported into another culture. Any study aimed at analysing popular literature and its translation should therefore consider the opposition "popular" vs "canonical" in historical terms and trace the boundaries between these two concepts in both the source and target cultures.

1.2.1 The emergence of popular literature as a historical phenomenon

It is clear from what has been stated above that terms and definitions have only a limited usefulness for an understanding of the nature of popular literature, which should be seen as a discursively formed object originating as early as the eighteenth century, with the rise of the middle classes (Bordoni and Fossati, 1985:11),⁸ and which has undergone many transformations throughout the decades as the centres of cultural power and the literary forms that were part of institutional discourse shifted. In particular, Tony Bennett identifies the development of the set of oppositions between "popular" and "canonical" in Britain

⁸ Bordoni and Fossati also state that in the eighteenth century all the main genres of popular literature were already present in their embryonic form: "Il poliziesco nasce dal romanzo d'avventure cittadino, il rosa dal romanzo sentimentale, la fantascienza dal gotico" [The detective genre derived from the city-set adventure novel, the romance from the sentimental novel, science fiction from the gothic novel] (Bordoni e Fossati, 1985:11).

in the second half of the nineteenth century, when a wider debate about the forms of recreation for “common people” emerged through the key figure of Matthew Arnold - whose *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869, “articulated concerns that were to remain at the forefront of debate until the 1950s” (Bennett, 1981:5). These concerns would become focused, as Bennett explains, on “the new forms of popular culture associated with the development of industrial capitalism – the popular press, the penny-dreadful and the cinema” and “were grouped under the category of ‘mass culture’” (*Ibid.*).

The objections raised against these forms were both social and aesthetic. On one hand, there was a tendency to see these texts as un-educational, culturally harmful, and sometimes even responsible for triggering antisocial behaviour. Juvenile delinquency, for instance, was perceived, at times, as caused by young people consuming popular texts; crime fiction was banned in Italy in 1941 by the then fascist regime, following the arrest of two young people of “good family” who confessed to having committed a robbery after reading a detective story (quoted in Bordoni and Fossati, 1985:60).

On the other hand, the development of the modernist movement in the early twentieth century promoted literary elitism and the idea that art had to be difficult and complex. Ken Gelder points to Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson as the two main literary figures who, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, embodied the conflict between literature as art and literature as craft, expressing the traits that would define high literature and popular literature: complexity vs simplicity, life vs fantasy, restraint vs excess (2004:17-20).

The idea that “popular literature” was an inferior form of literature persisted well into the twentieth century and lingered even when, in the 1980s, new critical perspectives attempted to examine popular texts with different, less judgemental, criteria. An example of the ambiguous attitude that characterised these attempts at rehabilitation is the way in which Tony Bennett and Graham Martin spoke of popular literature in their editors’ preface for a series of books about popular fiction. Although recognising the need to study these cultural objects as an important part

in people's lives - "popular fictions saturate the rhythms of everyday life (...) they help to define our sense of ourselves, shaping our desires, fantasies, imagined pasts and projected futures" (Bennett and Martin, 1990:ix) - it is possible to perceive a degree of defensiveness regarding this project that prompts the same scholars to end their preface declaring that studying popular fiction will lead to an improvement of the way in which it is produced and consumed: "what is ultimately at stake in such analysis is the production of a better popular fiction as well as of a better, politically more productive, way of reading it" (Bennett and Martin, 1990:x). However, it is not clear what this "improved" way of writing and reading popular fiction should consist of, apart from the traditional modes legitimised by the dominant cultural system.

1.2.2 The debate in the 1980s and the 'rehabilitation' of popular literature

A scholarly interest in popular literature that went beyond the need to condemn it as a debased literary form started to appear around the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, when a number of key publications tried to approach the problem of the exclusion of a large part of contemporary cultural production from the area of literary studies. These new approaches were generally adopted within the wider theoretical framework of Cultural Studies that, since its appearance in Britain in the 1950s, had had as its core objective the study of contemporary culture (During, 1993:1). As an "engaged form of analysis" (*Ibid.*) scholars working within this field rejected the idea that literature could or should be studied in isolation from society and politics. Of particular importance was the attempt to examine culture and literature in relation to those social groups that were normally excluded from traditional cultural pursuits, to analyse the way in which particular forms of cultural production provided these groups and individuals with a sense of identity and a way of resisting attempts to control and marginalise their forms of entertainment. In relation to popular literature, one of the main problems was that of reconciling the fact that the reading material of these social groups consisted of narratives, characterised by apparently conservative social models, factory-produced by profit-driven publishers. The patronising attitude that sees readers of popular literature as "cultural dopes" was questioned, for example, by Stuart Hall who pointed this out in his seminal essay on "Deconstructing the Popular"

If the forms and relationships on which participation in this sort of commercially provided 'culture' depend are purely manipulative and debased, then the people who consume and enjoy them must either be themselves debased by these activities or else living in a permanent state of 'false consciousness'. They must be 'cultural dopes' who can't tell that what they are being fed is an up-dated form of the opium of the people. (Hall, 1981:232)

This contradiction started to be viewed in terms of conflict, where 'popular culture' was a disputed terrain between the 'people' and those who have cultural power. Hall conceived of popular culture not so much in terms of concrete objects or categories but as a "constant battlefield", a place where acts of containment and resistance take place between the dominant culture and the dominated classes. What's more, he pointed out how such an area is never stable as there is no a-historical and fixed list of "popular cultural activities": popular culture is defined in different periods by what constitutes accepted and valued cultural activities and what is valueless and marginalised.

Writing a few years later, Christopher Pawling, who edited a volume dedicated to popular literature, remarked how popular texts are defined in terms of "otherness" as they contribute to establish the identity of the 'norm', i.e. the canon of English Literature⁹:

The identity of English Literature as an intellectual discipline is, in part, dependent on a 'significant other' – popular literature or 'paraliterature'- whose absence from the conventional syllabus is crucial in helping to constitute the dominant literary culture. (Pawling, 1984:1-2)

In spite of these attempts to see popular literature in a more positive way, a kind of ambiguity always remains. Readers can be seen as able to resist the pre-packaged meanings served to them by the dominant classes, but they are ultimately at the receiving end of the manipulative actions of those in power. Stuart Hall's attempt to shake the sterile argument that saw popular texts as something produced by

⁹ The concept of "otherness" started to be used to refer to those social groups, excluded from power, which are represented in a negative way in relation to a dominant social group represented as the "norm", for example colonised people in relation to colonizers. (Cf. the entry "other" in Hawthorn, 1994:41-42)

unscrupulous and profit-driven people for an indiscriminating readership is weakened by his idea of popular culture as a discourse emanating from the dominant classes which “continuously disorganise and reorganise popular culture” (1981:233).

As a matter of fact, some studies presented a more sophisticated picture of the dynamics of production and consumption of popular literature, where the people have a higher “agency” than is normally attributed to them. Janice Radway for example, studying the success of romantic fiction in the 1980s in *Reading the Romance* (1984), rejected the easy equation that such a success was due to an onslaught against feminism and that reading romances was a demonstration of women’s renewed acceptance of dominant patriarchal values. After a detailed account of the changes made within the paperback industry in the US, she also pointed to better marketing strategies on the part of the publishers, together with the specific characteristics of women’s life in America (Radway, 1984:19-45). At the same time, interviews with a group of women readers of romances showed that women were well aware of the issues at stake. They recognised the conservative social representations embedded in these narratives but used them as a form of protest and escapism from the reality of their daily life (Radway, 1984:86-91). At the end of her study, however, in spite of her recognition that people read popular literature because “they are not satisfied by their place within it [society] or by the restricted material and emotional rewards that accompany it” (Radway, 1984:222), Radway expressed the hope that one day there would be a “world where the vicarious pleasure supplied by its reading would be unnecessary” (*Ibid.*).

1.2.3 Reading popular literature as participatory culture

As I showed above, the debate about popular literature in the 1980s produced a kind of thinking that tended to see popular literature as a sort of ‘necessary evil’, acceptable as long as it provided common people with “utopian longing” (Radway, 1984:222), but which remained a highly ambiguous cultural form. A critical perspective focusing on readers - in an attempt to see how they transform an oft-stigmatised experience into something of personal value, i.e. a signifying practice - continued to be pursued in the following decades by researchers who showed a

less negative attitude towards popular texts. In fact, they often confessed to being themselves consumers, as for example Scott McCracken at the beginning of his study *Pulp. Reading Popular Fiction*: “Some of my happiest experiences reading popular fiction have been on trains” (McCracken, 1998:1). So, did Henry Jenkins in his seminal study of the SF series *Star Trek* and its fandom: “I am (...) a television fan who has enjoyed an active, participatory relationship to *StarTrek* and a variety of other programs for more than twenty years” (Jenkins, 1997:506). Jenkins’ study is particularly interesting as he explored how fan readers (especially media fans): “appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests” (Jenkins, 1997:508). Drawing on Michel De Certeau’s concepts of readers as “textual poachers” and “nomads”, Jenkins proposed a view of fans’ cultural activities as a way of challenging meanings imposed upon them from dominant cultural discourses, with fans producing their own textual interpretations.

Further criticism of the representation of readers of popular texts as passive and uncritical consumers of “escapist” narratives was offered more recently by Ken Gelder who challenged the ideology inscribed in the representation of the act of reading within high literature, which assumes that only the latter can be properly “read”, i.e. slowly and critically decoded in order to appreciate its complexities. He conceded that although popular fiction may be “read quickly rather than ‘closely’, its minutiae are nevertheless registered and responded to in all sorts of ways” (Gelder, 2004:35-38).

As a coda to this section I would like to reiterate that although I speak of a process of ‘rehabilitation’ of popular literature, I am aware that this is, in fact, a contradiction in terms. If we conceive of popular literature as a historical discourse – a discourse whose emergence is linked to the social imperative that requires that production of cultural hierarchies - it is clear that the new acceptability of previously rejected popular forms can only happen because other forms have taken their place. The debate in the 1980s was specifically focused on forms such as science fiction, detective fiction and romances - genres that at the time were marginalised but which, by now, have been at least partially integrated into the cultural system and are read without shame by intellectuals and taught in university courses. It must be noted however that these genres occupy different positions in the cultural

hierarchy, with romances still being placed on the “lowest” step (Murphy, 2017:124). On the other hand, the higher cultural status apparently obtained by science fiction and crime fiction is still a contested matter; in a recent debate on the pages of *The Guardian*, writer Margaret Atwood has rejected the label of science fiction for her novels, preferring the term “speculative fiction” (Atwood, 2011).

1.3 Translating popular literature

The examination of the theoretical discourse produced about popular literature has shown how the thinking on this subject has developed and which issues have been at the centre of the debate over time. The question that must be asked now is to what extent these issues also affect popular texts when they are translated.

As I have shown, while the notions of what is popular and what is canonical may change over time, the area of canonical texts appears, on the whole, more stable than that of popular texts. Regardless of which term we use, literature that is labelled as ‘canonical’, or ‘official’ or ‘mainstream’ is deemed as socially acceptable and worth reading and translating. On the other hand, popular literature is much more unstable and generally negatively connoted, as it may be perceived at best as ‘escapist’, aimed at entertainment, or at worst as socially and culturally unacceptable. Hence, it should be asked to what extent this higher instability and negative perception affects the translation of these texts.

The translation of mainstream or ‘serious’ literature is usually approached with a sense of respect for the text and the desire to produce translations that present themselves as faithful representations of the source text. As Emily Wittman notes “Since the nineteenth century, there has been a strong distinction between high and low literature, with the former receiving much more careful translation” (Wittman, 2013:441). While in practice such “respect” has not always been maintained and the concept itself of “faithful translation” has been subjected to different interpretations, it seems clear that the higher the status of the text, the stronger the wish to take account of its original form. In fact, from a historical point of view, popular literature seems to be at the centre of translation practices that

were once applied to the whole of the literary corpus. Clem Robyns, for instance, while analysing the translation of American detective novels into French observes that

during the last two centuries, there has been a large move in translation strategies, whereby the “free” or “dynamic” translation type (...) moved from the canonized to the non-canonized part of the literary system. (Robyns, 1990:39).

In spite of such similarity, however, the attitude at the root of these strategies is very different, as the translation of ‘serious’ literature appears to have been guided by the idea of preserving the ‘spirit’ of the original work even in those times when “free translations” were popular, for instance in the eighteenth century (Cf. Bassnett, 2002:67).

In popular literature, “free translations” are produced for other purposes and texts are often manipulated in radical ways for reasons that are not always clear. As John Milton reports in his article about the translation of mass fiction, the few studies conducted on this topic show that the strategy usually adopted to translate popular texts can be summarized by the word “omission” (Milton, 2000:171). While Milton’s observation is generally true, further analysis is necessary to establish what exactly is omitted and why. Omissions may occur at different levels of the text and may involve minor elements or large chunks of text; certain elements may be cut out to give a particular slant to the text; censorship may be applied. These elements require an examination of the context and actors involved in such practices, i.e. who publishes and translates popular literature, for whom and how. It is clear that, unlike the prestige and “cultural capital” enjoyed by canonical texts, popular literature comes with a ‘cultural baggage’ that can vary depending on a number of factors, starting with the perceived value of the texts in the receiving culture. When a genre is thought of as having a particularly low status, the whole cycle of production and consumption is affected, including the way in which the mediating agents transfer the text in a receiving culture. The lower the status, the less likely are the authors, translators and even readers to feel at ease with their activities and practices. Readers may be explicitly taken to task for their choices; for example British science fiction writer Gwyneth Jones commented on how her

reading science fiction has been socially questioned in a way that does not happen with other types of reading: “It’s curious the way people always expect you to *explain* your interest in science fiction” (Jones, 1992:171). Authorship becomes less significant and is often hidden behind pseudonyms. Bordoni and Fossati, for instance, state that “non c’è posto per l’autore nella letteratura di massa” [there is no place for the author in mass literature] (Bordoni and Fossati, 1985:72-73) and, focusing on the authors of popular romances, observe that “Lo pseudonimo sotto il quale si nascondono le centinaia di scrittrici rosa è anonimo e asettico, somigliante e intercambiabile con molti altri” [The pseudonyms under which hundreds of female romance writers hide themselves are anonymous and aseptic, they resemble many others and are interchangeable] (*Ibid.*).

The loss of the author in the original texts is mirrored by the ‘loss of the translator’ in the target texts. The omission of the name of the translator is by no means a practice limited to the translation of popular literature and it has also been widely present in mainstream literature. On the other hand, while the invisibility of the translator’s name in the latter is due to a generalized lack of recognition of translators as professional figures, in popular literature this practice is much more tolerated and perhaps even welcomed by the translators themselves, if they prefer not to be associated with a particular text or genre. Gender may also play a part in these practices. Certain genres tend to be associated with a particular gender, both in terms of who writes the texts and who reads them. Science fiction used to be perceived as a genre written by male authors for male readers (Stableford, 1988:65); on the other hand, romantic fiction is almost entirely associated with female authors and readers. One has to wonder to what extent a translator of the “wrong” gender would affect translation, in terms of its production and reception.

The “invisibility” of the translator of popular literature is usually compensated by his/her much wider freedom of intervention. Such freedom is, however, often curtailed by specific editorial policies, with the editor or publisher giving strict instructions to the translator as to what the target text should be like. An example of this can be seen in the translation of Harlequin romances from English into French and Greek, examined by George Paizis: the substantial cuts and changes of the original texts in the French versions were due to a specific editorial brief,

based on a series of assumptions about what was socially and culturally suitable for the French readership (Paizis, 1998:9). Interestingly, in Japan the opposite strategy was adopted to translate Harlequin romances. As Shibamoto Smith showed (2005), the Japanese target texts tend to be closer to the originals, to the point of going against established conventions not only in relation to the representation of relationships between sexes in domestic romantic fiction, but also in relation to Japan's social mores

The reader of a translated Harlequin is *not* reading a Japanese romance. The characters are depicted in Japanese, to be sure; they speak to each other and to other characters in Japanese, and they come to a mutual recognition of their attraction and true love in Japanese. But they inhabit 'western' social fields and react in ways that (...) are not the ways that Japanese true lovers speak, behave, and come to their own *happii-endingu* 'happy ending' in domestically produced romance novels. (Shibamoto Smith, 2005:99)

This "fidelity" is however not due to a sense of respect for the source texts but rather, as the author explained, to the publisher's assumption that the target readers are interested in foreign models of sexual relationships as the texts provide: "attractive, alternative ways of imagining lovely behaviour for the Japanese reader" (Shibamoto Smith, 2005:116). Hence, the apparent contradiction of the strategy adopted in the French and Japanese translation of Harlequin romances is not due to different attitudes towards the source texts but to a different assessment of the needs and expectations of the target readers.

From this perspective it appears that the elements that play a role in the production of original popular fiction also apply in its translation. Readers' appreciation of the "cultural product" is paramount, "industry" is a key word not only in relation to original popular texts (Gelder, 2004:15) but also to their translation. As happens in industrial production, an understanding of what may appeal to the readers is vital for the popular publishing business and what the 'appeal' may consist of will vary in relation to the genre. Texts of popular literature certainly tend to be seen as "commodities" and are subjected to the same marketing strategies of other mass products. On the other hand, popular texts are also "cultural objects". The ambiguity of the cultural system that tends to hide the "economic" factors regarding

the production of canonical texts (Bourdieu, 1986:138), equally hides the fact that popular texts are part of “culture” and as such the way in which they are produced, circulated, and read is socially significant. Taking this into account, translated popular texts shed light on the kind of socio-cultural factors that may come into play when these texts are imported into another culture. It is difficult not to see the excisions, alterations and general manipulative practices that characterise translated popular literature as instances of social interventions carried out on behalf of the readers. As George Paizis showed, the omissions and changes carried out in the French versions of the Harlequin romances are quite specific and refer to portions of texts that were deemed as unacceptable in relation to the French cultural context and dominant models of female behaviour (Paizis, 1997:10). Although Paizis is, on the whole, quite cautious and explains these cuts as partly due to adherence to the target culture models of romantic fiction, it seems to me that textual interventions of the kind that he reports have a clear ideological matrix and are part of that “politics of surveillance” which is typical of the production and circulation of popular culture and which I have discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. In particular, manipulations that are presented as ‘cultural adjustments’ may be, in fact, instances of censorship.¹⁰

1.3.1 Asymmetrical relationships: the cultural specificity of popular genres

One of the elements that may have played a role in this ‘politics of surveillance’ is the fact that most popular texts come from a specific source culture. Most genre fiction published in Italy and other European countries appeared originally in English, often in the US. It is clear then that a large majority of popular texts have an undeniably Anglo-Saxon flavour, even when the events narrated take place in exotic locations, as in romantic fiction, or on another planet, as in science fiction. The perception of this cultural specificity has not been limited to the worlds depicted in the texts, and it has been extended to the narrative forms that shape them, so that popular genres often continue to be seen as ‘foreign’ forms, and home-grown production has not been able to compete. Local attempts in the target cultures to

¹⁰ See Carter on the way in which the translation of popular fiction is used to shed light on political and socio-economic aspects in a target culture, including censorship (Carter, 2018:435-36).

produce similar narratives have generally had little success, with the effect of forcing writers to produce pseudotranslations, that is to say “texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts” (Toury, 1995:40). At the same time, local traditions of popular writings have often been marginalised, instead of becoming possible points of reference for the translators. In this way, popular texts, far from representing context-free and easily transferable fictional worlds – as their formulaic character may imply - are strongly associated with particular values and social models. The findings of researchers in this respect show how the acceptance or rejection of these models has played an important role in the way the texts have been rendered. As I already mentioned, one of the reasons why the category romances discussed by Paizis were manipulated was due to the French editors’ rejection of certain aspects of Anglo-Saxon models of female behaviour. The opposite trend seems to have influenced the translation of Anglo-American science fiction in France in the 1950s. As Jean-Marc Gouanvic reported, the agents of mediation who decided to import American science fiction in post-war France were driven by the desire to question traditional values (Gouanvic, 1997:130), to import a view of the future strongly influenced by American values as “American society was believed to offer a horizon that French society must necessarily aspire to attain” (Gouanvic, 1997:146).

It may be asked whether this cultural-specificity is peculiar to the genres under discussion or whether this is just a historical accident, and genres are “transcultural” (Stam, quoted in Chandler, 2000) and can “travel” easily between cultures. Cases studies show that there is a lot of variation concerning the success of a particular genre or text type, when this is transferred from a source culture into a receiving one. Sometimes, it seems that success is just a matter of choosing the right genre at the right moment, as Susan Bassnett showed in her analysis of the Italian sonnet translated into English in the sixteenth century: “The introduction of a new type of text (...) can be said to have happened at exactly the right time in English literature for that form to develop, because both the language and the literary system were ready to absorb it” (Bassnett, 1997:93). Theoretical thinking on the concept of genre seems to indicate, however, that genres are bound to the culture from which they originate. Stephen Neale, for example, does not see genres as static forms but as dynamic systems with a clear social component:

“genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject” (1981:6). This social element is particularly highlighted by Fredric Jameson for whom genre is based on an implied contract between writers and readers (quoted in Pawling, 1984:4). Contracts, which are forms of negotiations, are obviously socially based and bind both writers and readers in relation to what may be said and how within the boundaries of generic expectations. The question remains as to whether such complex textual forms can travel into another culture and be re-constructed respecting the original network of relationships.

1.3.2 Translation strategies in popular fiction

In this section I would like to examine more closely the question of the strategies adopted to translate popular literature. I have previously indicated that the strategies employed to translate popular texts vary, with a prevalence of radical interventions. In the area of translation studies, a specific terminology has been developed to describe and conceptualise the different approaches that characterise translated products. One question that must be asked is whether the terminology is suitable to describe the type of interventions seen in translated popular texts. Theoretical discourse on the practice of translation has identified two basic approaches which have been defined with different terms, based on a dichotomy with regards to the degree of proximity between the target text and the source text, i.e. their being source-oriented or target-oriented (Hatim, 2001:12-13; 43). This dichotomy has, at different times, been called in different ways, from the classic ‘literal’ vs ‘free’ translation (Munday, 2001:19-23), to the recent “Foreignization” vs “Domestication” terminology coined by Lawrence Venuti to describe literary translation practice in the US¹¹. All have, to varying degrees, tried to account for adherence to the syntactic structure and lexical system of the source text, or adherence to the stylistic and general textual conventions of the target culture.

¹¹ Venuti’s concepts are actually developed from Friedrich Schleiermacher and correspond to the idea of translation as something that either moves the reader towards the foreign text (foreignizing) or moves the foreign text towards the reader (domesticating) (Munday, 2001:146-7).

These descriptions, however, have largely been based on the translation of canonical literature (Milton, 2000:171) and it is debatable whether they can also be applied to the translation of popular texts, and particularly whether there is any feature or trend that distinguishes the translation of popular literature from that of canonical or mainstream literary texts. Based on the case studies available, it could be said that the translation of popular literature is characterised by a certain lack of balance. In some instances there are cuts, omissions and radical rewritings, in other instances the translations are rather close to the source texts. It is difficult to account for such wide differences, as these strategies do not seem specific to particular genres or periods; sometimes they even include the co-existence of shortened versions and faithful renderings. Examples of this can be seen in the translation of science fiction in France and in Italy. Jean-Marc Gouanvic indicated that while French translations of Anglo-American science fiction were generally rather close to the originals, other texts presented substantial cuts and domesticating strategies (Gouanvic, 1997:138). Other examples of these diverging strategies may be found in the Italian translations of science fiction, with substantial manipulations in popular SF series such as *Urania* and “restored” versions in other later series (see Chapter II of this thesis). Sometimes the radical interventions seem to be due to the way in which popular texts were published: for instance, as cheap pocket editions, with a specific number of pages to keep the price low and the consequent reduction of longer texts. On the other hand, source-oriented translations tend to be adopted when the agents of translation want to raise the status of the popular texts. In this case, texts tend to be ‘fully’ translated, all parts that were missing in previous editions are restored, and the new status of the text as an “unabridged” version may be advertised as part of a wider strategy aimed at making the texts more culturally acceptable (see Chapter IV of this thesis). The ‘restoration’ of previously manipulated texts may also be due to genre shifts, as discussed by Bianchi and D’Arcangelo (2015) in relation to two Italian translations of Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander*. While the first 1983 translation was marketed as a ‘historical romance’ and presented several cuts and heavy manipulation, the second unabridged translation, published in 2003, was described as a ‘historical novel’, a genre that occupies a higher position in the cultural hierarchy.

From the above discussion it is clear that there are still many questions to be asked in relation to the translation of popular literature, particularly regarding the existence of specific features or trends that would distinguish the transfer of popular texts compared with that of mainstream or 'serious' literature. Although the answer to these questions cannot be provided within the limited scope of this project, I hope that by asking them I have prepared a better ground for the investigation that will follow in the next chapters, showing that some of the issues that will emerge are not restricted to science fiction, but are part of a wider field concerned with the conditions of existence and functions of popular texts in society.

In the remainder of this chapter my analysis will focus on the specific genre of science fiction, starting with a brief look at its main historical features and definition issues. In the final section, I will examine the question of the specificity of translating science fiction looking at the available literature on this topic.

1.4 Defining science fiction

It is generally agreed that science fiction as an established genre emerged in the US in the early twentieth century, from the production of 'pulp' publications that characterised the popular literary scene in North America at the time. Although texts whose themes were 'science fictional' were published before those years and in other Western countries, by convention the actual 'birth' of the genre is situated in 1926, when Hugo Gernsback, originally from Luxembourg and a science-enthusiast, founded the magazine *Amazing Stories* and coined the term "science fiction", a further elaboration from the initial expressions "scientific fiction" and "scientifiction". After the colourful and naïve narratives of the early decades, often published in *Amazing Stories* – which would be later defined as space-operas¹² - science fiction took a "technological turn" towards the end of the 1930s and the 1940s with the arrival on the scene of John Campbell Jr. the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*. Campbell, a graduate from MIT with a degree in physics, was the first to set limits and rules on what a science fiction story should be like, rejecting

¹² According to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, the term "space-opera" was invented by Wilson Tucker in 1941 and was initially intended as a sarcastic description of the kind of "excessive" stories published in the pulps. Later the term lost a bit of its negative connotation and started to be used to refer to the "colourful action-adventure stories of interplanetary or interstellar conflict". (http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/space_opera: Last accessed: 12/07/15)

stories devoid of a solid logical basis in relation to their scientific-technological content, as well as stories whose literary form was less than acceptable. This period, defined as the Golden Age of Science Fiction, was characterised by the publication of works that would become classics of science fiction and would be included in the canon of the genre, such as Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy or Robert Heinlein's stories. In spite of Campbell's higher standards, it must be noted that Gernsback's pulp science fiction and Campbell's had in common a positive representation of science, as the editors shared the belief that science fiction could have a didactic purpose.

All this would change in the following decade when, as Roberts notes, "From Asimov's confidence that science, applied properly, could solve all problems, we find in the 1950s an increasing scepticism" (Roberts, 2000:78). The so-called sociological science fiction flourished, with dystopian stories often set in a future America that showed the dismal consequences of contemporary social trends. The magazine *Galaxy Science Fiction* (1950-1980), edited by H. L. Gold, was especially associated with this current, publishing authors who would become known for the kind of often ferociously satirical and polemical stories typical of sociological science fiction – such as Robert Sheckley, Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, and Ray Bradbury¹³, who published "The Fireman" in *Galaxy* in 1951, a short story that was the base for the famous novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

This trend towards social criticism continued in the 1960s with the so-called New Wave¹⁴ that, in addition to even more disquieting portraits of dystopian futures,

¹³ Robert Sheckley (1928-2005) became particularly famous for his satirical short-stories and novels, some of which were adapted for cinema and television. One of his most popular stories was "The Seventh Victim" (1953) based on the idea that in the future killing will be legalized and turned into a sort of game. The popular series *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010) may have been inspired by Sheckley's story. Frederick Pohl (1919-2013) and Cyril M. Kornbluth (1923-1958) published as a collaboration two of the most well-known novels of sociological science fiction, *The Space Merchants* (1953) a satire about hyper-consumerism and *Gladiator at Law* (1955) where the world is dominated by big corporations and the masses are kept under control by way of gladiatorial games. Ray Bradbury (1920-2012) was one of the most important and esteemed SF writers in the world, with many of his works adapted for television and cinema. Robert Sheckley and Ray Bradbury in particular are important for the present work as their distinct SF would be chosen by Italian critic Sergio Solmi for a famous Italian anthology, representing a point of reference for future SF published and written in Italy (see Chapter III).

¹⁴ The British magazine *New Worlds* became particularly associated with *The New Wave* movement in the 1960s thanks to Michael Moorcock's editorship, and the publication of works by writers such as J.G. Ballard and Thomas M. Disch.

experimented with form and style: science fiction, as writer J.G. Ballard said, should explore the “inner space” instead of the “outer [space]” (Ballard, quoted in James, 1990:170), rejecting “hard, technological SF” for the “softer sciences”. In the 1970s, science fiction’s horizon was further widened as minority groups began to express the voices from the margin. It was especially in this decade that science fiction works dealing with issues of race and gender appeared, such as Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979). In the 1980s cyberpunk came to the fore, merging the technological gadgets of hard science fiction with the dystopian visions of the 1960s and their anti-establishment attitude.

This brief excursus shows how rich and varied science fiction is and points to why a definition of this genre has always been problematic. In fact, while all generic literature changes and adjusts over time, science fiction has shown a marked capacity not only to evolve but also to absorb aspects from other genres and traditions of imaginative literature that makes it very difficult to find a definition encompassing all these specific elements. As Roberts notes

All the many definitions offered by critics have been contradicted or modified by other critics, and it is always possible to point to texts consensually called SF that fall outside the usual definitions.
(Roberts, 2000:1-2)

A detailed analysis of such definitions would be beyond the scope of this project, which is concerned not so much with identifying the essential elements of science fiction (assuming that this is possible) but rather seeing how specific social groups and individuals in Italy interpreted SF. Therefore, the definition of science fiction that I offer here is mainly given as a point of reference for later discussions in the thesis.

Most commentators seem to agree that science fiction is about “difference”, conveyed though some kind of *novum*¹⁵ (a conceptual or material embodiment of

¹⁵ The concept of *novum* as a necessary element in science fiction to mark its difference from realist fiction was first conceptualised by Darko Suvin “SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional “novum” (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic” (Suvin, 1979).

alterity) that signals the difference between the 'real' world and a science fictional world. For instance, Prucher defines SF as

A genre (of literature, film, etc.) in which the setting differs from our own world (e.g. by the invention of new technology, through contact with aliens, by having a different history, etc.), and in which the difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions; hence, such a genre in which the difference is explained (explicitly or implicitly) in scientific or rational, as opposed to supernatural, terms.
(Prucher, 2007:171)

This is a 'serviceable' definition that may be useful to distinguish a science fiction text not only from realist fiction, but also from other non-realist texts. What it does not explain is the purpose of such 'difference', i.e. which cultural function it is supposed to fulfil. An answer may be found in Adam Roberts's conceptualisation of science fiction as a symbolist genre, where 'difference' is intended as a "symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives of normally marginalised discourses of race, of gender, of non-conformism and alternative ideologies" (Roberts, 2000:28). This idea of science fiction may appear rather radical and limited to few (mostly recent) progressive texts. On the other hand, Gary Westfahl argues that such discourse was present even in earlier decades as an effect of the alienation from society felt by the SF readership, broadly identified as young white males¹⁶

If, at that time [in the 1940s and 1950s], you read magazines with pictures of squid-like monsters and built miniature rockets in your backyard, you undoubtedly felt rejected, ridiculed, and out of place. Such people often bond with, and adopt the attitudes of, other members of society who feel rejected, ridiculed and out of place. (Westfahl, quoted in Roberts, 2000:29)

This sense of difference was not only articulated symbolically within texts, but it was also played out at a social level, as it led to the strong bonding between SF readers and the development of the phenomenon called 'fandom' which will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁶ While the idea that all SF readership consisted of socially isolated young males is probably an excessive generalization (James, 1994:98-99), some critics suggest that there may be some truth in this claim. For example, Stableford notes that the surveys done by several SF publishers indicate that before the 1970s the readership consisted mainly of young males (1987:64-65).

1.4.1 Sociological elements in the production and consumption of science fiction

One of the elements that has distinguished science fiction from other popular genres is the relationship between writers, editors and readers, the tendency of the latter to build a strong community of devoted fans who devote time to networking activities, such as organising conventions, creating fanzines, naming awards, etc., what has been called fandom¹⁷. Interestingly, this tendency seems to be transnational as it has been replicated also outside the US, and communities of science fiction readers have appeared in France, Italy and other countries.

The degree of knowledge that these fan-readers acquire in relation to their favourite genre should be noted. Ken Gelder has commented on how one of the characteristics of popular literature is the cumulative knowledge that writers, readers and editors gain about the genre at the centre of their activity: "Genre is a matter of knowledge, which some people have (e.g. those writers who produce genre fiction and those readers who make their way through it) and other people don't." (Gelder, 2004:2). This competence clearly plays a crucial role in relation to the production and consumption of the narratives. Writers can play with the rules of generic conventions, relying on readers' knowledge of these rules and their recognition of innovations and intertextual references. This means that translators must be aware of these elements if they want to produce translations consistent with readers' expectations.

This is particularly true for science fiction, where readers' interaction with editors and writers has entered the narratives themselves, with writers interspersing their texts with references to the SF world and tradition, in the knowledge that these would be recognised and appreciated by their readership. This begs the question of how such an interplay is treated when the texts are translated, since it is unlikely

¹⁷ See James (1994, Ch. IV) for an account of the impact of fandom on the development of SF and the creation of an SF community.

that the target readers would recognise allusions referring to the US science fiction context.

1.4.2 Specific problems in the translation of science fiction

Translating science fiction also implies dealing with problems at the micro-level, such as syntax, lexicon and textual organization. Apart from the customary problems that affect the translation of any literary texts, it should be asked whether there are problems that are specific to the science fiction text and to what extent these have been solved. An examination of the literature available on the translation of science fiction provides only limited knowledge. Jean-Marc Gouanvic's examination of the translation of American SF in post-war France (1997) and Aniko Sohar's study of the importation of cyberpunk and fantasy in post-communist Hungary (1999) give ample details of the wider socio-cultural context and institutions and main actors responsible for the transfer of what was, in both cases, a new literary genre. Both studies indicate that, on the whole, source-oriented strategies were favoured, although some texts presented the typical cuts and omissions that are found in a lot of translated popular literature. Iannuzzi, on the other hand, notes that heavy manipulation characterised most translation of science fiction into Italian in the 1950s when the genre was introduced into the country (Iannuzzi, 2014a, see Chapter II). On the topic of specific translation problems, Gouanvic does not detect any difficulties on the part of the translators in the rendering of science fiction into French (1997:143). The source texts were not adapted and did not show omissions, unlike, for example, what happened to the French translation of detective fiction (Robyns, 1990) or the romances studied by Paizis. Even science fiction specific "technolects and exolects (...) posed no particular problem" (Gouanvic, 1997:143). The main strategy adopted is one of close adherence to the source texts, where references to the foreign culture are fully transferred so that translators obtain "a product that proclaims its American origin through every means available, textual as well as paratextual" (*Ibid.*). From Gouanvic's comments, one could assume that the translation of science fiction is a relatively straightforward business undertaken with relative ease.

However, other commentators seem to challenge this view. Nicoletta Vallorani, an Italian scholar, author and translator of science fiction, states that “tradurre un’opera di fantascienza è molto meno semplice di quanto normalmente si ritenga” [translating a work of science fiction is not as simple as one may normally assume] (Vallorani, 1993:208). Science fiction narratives are usually characterised by references to specific scientific areas and terms (real or invented) and the translators habitually working on science fiction texts may be expected to possess a broad knowledge of scientific subjects, although not necessarily in an in-depth way. In addition, science fiction stories are often set in a world that is unknown to the reader, such as the Earth in the far future or another planet, where a number of neologisms may be used to describe the new world. Massimiliano Morini describes the narrators of such stories as ethnographers (in Zacchi, Morini, Scatasta, 2002:93) but the same term can be applied to the translators who have to convey these strange fictional worlds to the reader and decide how to render the invented words or even languages, whether to keep their ‘alien’ quality as Morini recommends (*Ibid.*) or re-invent them in the target language.

It seems then that to be effective translators of science fiction requires a thorough knowledge of the genre, together with the conceptual competence of a technical translator and the inventiveness of the literary one.

Outside Western tradition, problems seem to intensify, especially when the exchange goes in the opposite direction and the English text has to accommodate stories coming from a very different tradition. In a paper about Judith Merrill’s attempt to translate and publish an anthology of Japanese science fiction, Diane Newell and Jenea Tallentire gave a short account of the problems encountered by the well-known science fiction writer and editor, problems that drove her to abandon the project. This issue was taken up again in a recent post in the website of *Hakasoru*, an American imprint of Japanese science fiction translated into English, where editor and translator Nick Mamatas commented on the difficulties of translating Japanese science fiction in English: “I still must do a fair amount of heavy lifting in the editorial stage. Translating Japanese SF certainly seems to me to still take two: an excellent translator of Japanese and someone well-versed in science fictional concepts.” (Mamatas, 2010).

1.5 Conclusions

The different, contradictory responses about the translation of popular genres I highlighted in the above section show how little is still known about this topic. Why did the French translators mentioned by Gouanvic translate their material with apparent ease? Was it a matter of the kind of stories that were chosen, perhaps on the basis of their translatability? Was it due to a stronger bond between the French and American tradition of science fiction?¹⁸ Was it a matter of pride? Gouanvic does say that French translators didn't differentiate between canonical literature and science fiction and, presumably, it would have been embarrassing to say that science fiction was more difficult to translate. On the other hand, the Italian translators seem to have developed a specific generic competence, so much so that Nicoletta Vallorani speaks of a "scuola di traduzione" [school of translation] of science fiction (1993:209-10). In addition, such competence cannot be improvised as it is an effect of the translators' cumulative knowledge obtained through a kind of 'trial and error' procedure (*Ibid.*). The expression "school of translation" evokes a sort of institutionalization of the practice, a preference for a particular approach and strategies, perhaps a set of 'precedents' which translators can rely upon to guide them. In this case, the translation of science fiction would appear as requiring a sort of special competence, in the same way that different textual types, such as technical texts, plays, etc., need special consideration.

The translation of science fiction is obviously a matter that needs further investigation and it is the aim of this research to provide some insights into this question. In the following chapters this issue will be explored by examining the way in which science fiction was translated into Italian between the 1950s and 1970s, looking at which particular translation approaches were adopted and the significance of such approaches in relation to the Italian sociocultural context.

¹⁸ Jules Verne was one of the writers whose stories appeared in the first issues of *Amazing Stories* when Hugo Gernsback was trying to give a shape to the new genre (Cf. Luckhurst, 2005:62).

CHAPTER II
THE INTRODUCTION OF SCIENCE FICTION IN ITALY.
PUBLISHERS, EDITORS, TRANSLATORS AND CRITICS (1950S-1960S)

2.1 Introduction

There is common agreement among scholars (Pagetti, 1979; Antonello, 2008; Iannuzzi, 2014a) that in Italy science fiction came into being as a stand-alone genre in the early 1950s, when a number of short stories and novels, mainly translated from English, started to be published in cheap book series and magazines. Throughout the 1950s and in the following decade a multitude of science fiction narratives appeared in succession, sold in bookstalls, mostly at very cheap prices, advertising their futuristic content through gaudy and colourful images on their covers, using the typical visual clichés of the genre, such as rockets, alien landscapes and creatures, and robots.

One of the issues discussed by scholars is the reason why SF as a specific genre only took hold in Italy in the 1950s, since SF had been established in the US and elsewhere since the 1920s. This delay has been explained with historical and cultural reasons. On the one hand, Italy's late development of an industrial system and its largely agricultural economy had not provided the right environment for developing an interest in science and technology - a feature that seems to have informed the development of the genre in other contexts, for example in the US. On the other hand, in Italy the dominant cultural perspective had always privileged a humanist tradition over the scientific approach to knowledge, with the consequence of a general marginalisation of science in society, including in educational contexts. It was only in the post-war years, with improved economic and social conditions, the development of an industrial system and a resurgent publishing industry, that it was possible for science fiction to emerge as a genre among new segments of the reading public, particularly young people (Antonello, 2008; Iannuzzi, 2014a).

As a number of commentators have highlighted (Antonello, 2008; Cozzi, 2006; Iannuzzi, 2014a; Lippi, 2015), this pioneering period was dominated by *Urania*, a science fiction book-series published by Mondadori, which would become the most successful and long-lasting¹⁹ SF series in Italy, still in print today. Its importance was such that subsequent series and magazines built their identity in relation to *Urania*, either imitating its model or contesting it, including the series and periodicals that will be examined in the core chapters of this thesis. Thus, an examination of *Urania* and other periodicals published in the 1950s and 1960s is necessary to provide a better contextualisation of my investigation.

In the following sections I will provide an overview of *Urania*'s features and the particular image of science fiction that it projected, in order to better understand how later series and magazines tried to differentiate themselves. I will first look at *Urania*'s paratextual elements to show the presentational strategies adopted for the books and their key role in making the series appealing for Italian readers. I will then focus on *Urania*'s translated texts, to see which translation approach was chosen by the Italian mediators in relation to texts that were perceived as belonging to a new generic category in the Italian cultural system. Particular attention will be given to the way in which translation was shaped in order to meet the demands of the internal market, as translated works have to "fit the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time" (Lefevere, 1992a: 8) to be accepted in the target culture. In subsequent sections, I will also briefly examine some other SF book series and magazines that are particularly significant for this project.

While the publishers, editors and translators of the 1950s popular magazines and book-series had a prominent role in constructing an image of science fiction in Italy, some literary critics also gave their own interpretation of the new genre, albeit for a more limited and specialised audience. Their ideas mostly remained confined within the pages of specialised publications, but one of these critics, Sergio Solmi, was especially influential as he offered an interpretation of science fiction that was particularly successful among critics and readers. Thus, special attention will be

¹⁹ The very first Italian publication of science fiction was a short-lived magazine named *Scienza Fantastica. Avventure nello spazio, tempo e dimensione*, published in Rome in 1952 by Krator Editore and edited by Lionello Torossi. The magazine ceased publication in March 1953, after seven issues.

given to his work. The contribution given by critics to the construction of an image of science fiction will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

2.2 Publishers, editors, translators

- *Urania* and the 'popular' representation of science fiction

In an account of the development of science fiction in the 1950s, Italian copyeditor and translator Andreina Negretti mentioned the problems faced by those whose job was to transfer Anglo-American science fiction into Italian in those early days

Chi la conosceva, allora un'astronave? Chi sapeva come ne avveniva il decollo? Chi aveva mai visto una tuta spaziale? Chi aveva sentito parlare di satelliti artificiali? (...) Medicina spaziale, ingegneria, aerodinamica, elettronica, linguaggio da elaboratori di computer, tutte nozioni specialistiche con termini ben precisi introvabili sui dizionari.²⁰
(Negretti, 1978:53)

Andreina Negretti was at the time working for publisher Mondadori and she had been involved in the production of science fiction since 1955 when she became the assistant of Giorgio Monicelli, founder of *Urania* and the man who, in a sense, invented Italian science fiction, including the Italian name for the new genre, "fantascienza". While Monicelli's role has been highlighted and celebrated by many commentators (Antonello, 2008; Iannuzzi, 2014a; Cozzi, 2006), Negretti's contribution has been less known but not less important, as recent research has highlighted (Iannuzzi, 2018). Not a fan reader of science fiction herself, Negretti's words give the measure of the bafflement that "quella curiosa narrativa d'oltre oceano" [that strange narrative from across the ocean], as she called it (Negretti, 1978:53), caused among those who dealt with it in those early years. Negretti's string of questions also conveys the sense of wonder that such stories evoked, pointing to a new form of exoticism that instead of taking readers to remote lands on Earth, led them into the fantastic realms of intergalactic space. Like the

²⁰ [Who knew a starship, at that time? Who knew how it took off? Who had ever seen a space suit? Who had heard of artificial satellites? (...) Space medicine, engineering, aerodynamics, electronics, computer language, these are all specialized notions with specific terms that could not be found in dictionaries].

explorers of lost worlds in the adventure novels that had dominated the market of popular literature in the past decades²¹, these new readers had to deal not only with the familiar threats of traditional adventure but also with the futuristic visions and the often obscure “technobabble” that characterizes the genre. It was Andreina Negretti’s task, as well as that of Giorgio Monicelli and the other translators and editors of the time, to help readers safely cross what were perceived as difficult textual waters, producing science fiction in Italian that could be understood by and attract the new readership that, as Iannuzzi points out, had emerged in the post-war years (Iannuzzi, 2018).

This was not easy to accomplish, as by the time the first SF magazines and book series started to circulate in Italy the genre had been established in the US since the 1920s (James, 1994:52-53) and had grown not only in terms of quantity but also quality, with writers and readers developing a common base of knowledge of typical tropes and conventions. In addition, SF had evolved into a number of sub-genres, going from the gadget-story and space adventure typical of the first pulps, to the more technically-orientated stories published in the 1940s, and, finally, in the Fifties, to stories dealing with “social” issues, and less interested in technological details (Giovannini and Minicangeli, 1998:22).

One of the main problems facing Monicelli and other publishers and editors of the time was what to select from this wide repertoire and how to present and translate the texts that had to introduce the new genre of science fiction. As I will show, both paratextual and textual strategies played a key role in constructing an image of SF acceptable to the readership, mediating between the new material coming from America and the system of popular genres the readers were familiar with.

- *I romanzi di Urania*: paratextual features in the book-series

*I romanzi di Urania*²² started to be published in October 1952, as a book-series that should have accompanied the magazine *Urania. Avventure nell’universo e nel*

²¹ See for example the novels by Emilio Salgari (1862-1911), stories of pure adventure taking place in exotic settings, which enjoyed great commercial success (Facciolo, 1992:487).

²² From No. 153, the heading will simply be “Urania”.

tempo, launched in November 1952. The magazine was Monicelli's original project, but it was the book-series that encountered the favour of the readership, with sales that exceeded expectations (Antonello, 2008:116) while the magazine ceased publication after fourteen issues (see the relevant section below).

The first SF text published in the *I romanzi di Urania* book series was a novel by Arthur C. Clarke, *The Sands of Mars* (1951), translated into Italian as *Le sabbie di Marte* (1952). It dealt with the first trip to Mars by a group of astronauts and the colonisation of the red planet. The type of story chosen was exemplary of the kind of science fiction preferred for the *Urania* series: adventurous, with some scientific elements but not excessively technical, and able to engage readers. As we shall see, these features were especially enhanced through translation, which had a key role in transforming the foreign narratives into something that conformed with the publisher and the editors' ideas of what the Italian version of science fiction should be like. Before examining this aspect, however, it is worth looking at the way in which the texts were presented through paratextual²³ elements, that is to say through those elements that in a book have the role of 'presenting' the text, providing an initial interpretation, such as the title, the blurb, the art cover, following Genette's classic definition (1997).

Critics have highlighted how paratexts had a fundamental role in introducing the new genre of science fiction (Pagetti, 1978; Iannuzzi, 2014a; Lippi, 2015), offering an initial image of the genre. This essential role is already evident in the blurb of *Le sabbie di Marte* which, being the first novel, had the function not only of describing the plot in an interesting way, but also that of telling readers what science fiction was. As a matter of fact, in this blurb Monicelli describes the genre by introducing his own neologism, "fantascienza", and explaining that the book contains "una narrativa a sfondo scientifico e fantastico" [a narrative based on science and fantasy] (Monicelli,²⁴ 1952:2), apparently giving equal value to the two components. This balance is maintained in the rest of the blurb, where the "scientific" and "fantastic" aspects are evoked in a number of ways. One is the

²³ See Chapter IV for a discussion of paratexts and of their importance in translation.

²⁴ While the blurbs are usually anonymous, it is widely recognized that the author of the *Urania*'s blurbs was Giorgio Monicelli during the time of his editorship of the series, as they had specific stylistic features (Lippi, 2015:75).

reference to the professional status of the novel's author, Arthur C. Clarke, described as "un noto scienziato, membro della British Astronomical Association e Presidente della Società interplanetaria britannica" [a well-known scientist, a member of the British Astronomical Association and Chair of the British Interplanetary Society] (from the blurb), something that reinforces and legitimizes the "scientific" element of the story. This stress on the scientific authoritativeness of the text could also be seen as having an educational purpose and be part of "the 'pedagogical' aim of publisher and editor who had identified their readers as "young, interested in technology and the development of the sciences" (Pagetti, 1979). At the same time, the blurb also emphasises the most adventurous and exciting aspects of the plot through a hyperbolic lexicon, as can be seen in the passage below where the author of the blurb, after providing the main lines of the plot, describes the events on Mars as

una lotta affascinante e paurosa su un mondo in agonia dove non esiste quasi più traccia di vegetazione e l'aria è così povera di ossigeno da essere praticamente irrespirabile.²⁵ (Monicelli, 1952:2)

The emphasis on the sensational aspects of the story was a typical strategy of the *Urania* blurbs. Iannuzzi notes how their bombastic tone had the aim of attracting readers, offering a vision of extraordinary adventures and wondrous events (Iannuzzi, 2014a:41).

To a lesser extent, this same strategy was pursued through the titles, another element that also served to attract readers. In this case, the typical strategy was to use key words that evoked images associated with established genres of popular culture such as adventure, mystery and horror. Titles were often completely rewritten to highlight a sensational element, especially exploiting stock imagery of terror (Bianchi, 2015), as can be clearly seen from the examples below (Table 1), selected from the first one hundred *Urania*'s titles. Words such as "notte" [night], "orrenda" [horrible], "terrore" [terror], "maledetto" [cursed], "mostro" [monster],

²⁵ [a frightening and fascinating struggle in an agonizing world where there is hardly any trace of vegetation and the air is so poor of oxygen that it is unbreathable.]

“vampiro” [vampire], etc. are all words that can easily be associated with stories dealing with the gothic tradition. While some of these titles may be justified, for example for “Il figlio della notte” [The child of the night] (Ex. 2) which deals with the theme of lycanthropy, other titles stretch the genre boundaries, such as the rendering of Robert H. Heinlein’s novel *The Puppet Masters* (1951) as *Il terrore della sesta luna*, [The terror of the sixth moon] 1952, (Ex. 3) or the translation of *The Transcendent Man* (1953) by Jerry Sohl as *I vampiri della morte* [The vampires of death], 1955. Both novels deal with a classic theme of SF, an alien race threatening humankind, but the titles steer the interpretation of the text towards the themes of horror literature.

A number of factors may explain why so many novels present such gothic overtones in their titles. Antonello mentions Monicelli’s interest in the paranormal and magic (2008: 23), while Iannuzzi indicates that the gothic elements may be connected to other book series by Mondadori, whose format *Urania* had imitated (Iannuzzi, 2014a:26). On the other hand, the adapted titles may also indicate that they were the result of an editorial strategy aimed at making the new genre acceptable, through the use of the conventions of more familiar genres as is typical when new literary products are imported in a new cultural space.

Table 1 – A selection of Urania’s titles with gothic overtones (issues 1-100)

Example	English title	Italian translation	Back Translation
1	The day of the Triffids, 1951	L' orrenda invasione, (Urania 3, 1952)	The horrible invasion
2	Darker than you think, 1940	Il figlio della notte , (Urania 4, 1952)	The child of the night
3	The Puppet Masters, 1951	Il terrore della sesta luna (Urania 5, 1952)	The terror of the sixth moon
4	Sinister barrier, 1939	Schiavi degli invisibili (Urania 7, 1952)	Slaves of the invisible ones
5	Dreadful sanctuary, 1948	Il pianeta maledetto , (Urania 16, 1953)	The cursed planet
6	Star of ill-omen, 1952	Minaccia occulta , (Urania 22, 1953)	Hidden/Occult menace
7	City at world's end, 1951	Agonia della Terra, (Urania 23, 1953)	Agony of the Earth
8	The Moon is Hell, 1950	Martirio lunare, (Urania 30, 1953)	Lunar martyrdom
9	But without horns, 1940	La morte azzurra, (Urania 33, 1954)	The blue death
10	The Kraken wakes, 1953	Il risveglio dell' abisso , (Urania 35, 1954)	The awakening of the abyss
11	The haploids, 1952	Morbo orrendo , (Urania 50, 1954)	Horrible disease
12	Donovan's brain, 1943	Il cervello mostro , (Urania 60, 1954)	Monster brain
13	Ceux de nulle part, 1954	Galassia maledetta , (Urania 63, 1954)	Cursed galaxy
14	The transcendent man, 1953	Vampiri della morte , (Urania 68, 1955)	The vampires of death
15	Killer to come, 1953	Il futuro che uccide , (Urania 71, 1955)	The future that kills
16	Missing men of Saturn, 1953	L'astronave fantasma , (Urania 81, 1955)	The phantom starship
17	Undying monster. A Tale of the Fifth Dimension, 1922	Il mostro immortale (Urania 85, 1955)	Immortal monster
18	Fear, 1940	Le quattro ore di Satana , (Urania 89, 1955)	Satan's four hours
19	Sons of the ocean deeps, 1952	Figli dell' abisso , (Urania 95, 1955)	The children of the abyss

- *Urania's translations*

The translations published in *Urania* have been a target of criticism for a long time (Iannuzzi, 2014a:37; Lippi, 2015:106), at least since 1962, when an article by Sebastiano Fusco and Gianfranco De Turrís published in the SF magazine *Oltre il cielo* with the telling title *Lo scandalo delle traduzioni* [The scandal of translations] denounced the practice of publishing translated texts that were abridged and full of mistakes and inaccuracies. Since then, the issue has been variously debated in articles, books and, in recent years, blogs dedicated to SF, usually aimed at condemning the publisher's policy of reducing the source texts. Even when these cuts have been explained as essential to the existence of *Urania*, as in a 2010 blog post by the current editor of *Urania*, Giuseppe Lippi, readers responded negatively and even suggested ways of overcoming this problem, such as suitable warning in the inside pages about the abridged nature of the texts.²⁶ In the 1950s, however, there was very little awareness of the textual practices that shaped *Urania* and of the fact that, as Lippi points out, "curatori e traduttori tagliavano di brutto" [editors and translators cut mercilessly] (Lippi, 2010).

The issue of *Urania's* translations has recently been approached by some critics (Iannuzzi, 2014b and 2018; Lippi, 2015; Cozzi, 2006) and while these contributions have shed some light on this practice, there still seems to be some confusion on how to describe translational and editorial interventions that were different in nature - some originating from the publisher's brief, some from the translators and editors' idiosyncrasies, some the result of deliberate choices, some the result of unconscious ones. First of all, it must be noted that the reduction of texts in publishing was not limited to *Urania* and Mondadori. The same policy had been applied to the series *I gialli*, a crime fiction series founded in 1929 by Mondadori that had been a model for *Urania* (Iannuzzi, 2014a:25-26) but it was also widely

²⁶ The whole debate was caused by the cuts made in the translation of *Rainbows End* (2006) by Vernon Vinge published in *Urania* of August 2010 as *Alla fine dell'arcobaleno*. The readers' protests caused the response of the editor, Giuseppe Lippi, who criticized readers for being excessively pedantic and defended the publisher's policy as essential for the existence of the book-series. See Lippi, 2010 at: <http://blog.librimondadori.it/blogs/urania/2010/07/26/urania-1561-alla-fine-dellarcobaleno/>

practiced by other publishers and in other genres, including texts that were not part of popular series²⁷. As Lippi pointed out

all'epoca, i testi non andavano semplicemente tradotti ma spesso adattati, scremati delle parti più difficili o imbarazzanti e dei riferimenti incomprensibili alla nostra cultura.²⁸ (Lippi, 2015:45)

Similar practices, however, were present also in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, and this shows how the *Urania's* translation policy was rooted in the target culture's attitude to translated texts

era prassi solita in quegli anni [1940s] la tendenza a preferire una ricreazione più o meno libera del testo di origine rispetto a una traduzione rigorosamente fedele all'originale.²⁹ (Barrale, 2018)

Such interventions were often presented as “miglioramenti” [improvements] but were, in fact, ways to justify changes related to aesthetic, ideological and socio-cultural expectations regarding what was acceptable in translated texts. Such changes had sometimes even been approved by critics, as Barrale shows in her study of translated German popular fiction during fascism (Barrale, 2018). The 1950s were clearly a transitional period in this respect as past practices lingered while new attitudes to translated texts, including popular texts, were slowly emerging as the article by Fusco and De Turrís I mentioned earlier shows.

Looking at the cuts and changes in the translated texts published in *Urania*, as analysed by Iannuzzi (2014a, 2014b and 2018), it appears that alterations were made in the following areas:

²⁷ Barrale, for example, reports the case of the Italian translation of *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, which was cut by around 140 pages in the Italian translation (Barrale, 2018 forthcoming).

²⁸ [At the time, texts were not simply translated but they were often adapted, deprived of the parts that were more difficult or embarrassing and of references that were obscure for our culture.]

²⁹ [It was common practice in those years [1940s] a tendency to prefer a more or less free re-creation of the source text than a translation that was rigorously faithful to the original.]

- 1- Cuts of all that was deemed superfluous to the plot (paragraphs, sentences, words)
- 2- Cuts of scientific and 'learned' elements
- 3- Omission of sexual references
- 4- Omission of cultural references

Iannuzzi rightly concludes that the kind of science fiction wanted by the *Urania's* editors and translators was one that "had to be entertaining and gripping, but not too demanding in terms of scientific knowledge" (Iannuzzi, 2018). However, the reduction of these elements also decreased the specificity of science fiction, enhancing the links with other types of popular genres - those that were already established in the Italian system of popular culture, such as pure adventure, mystery and horror (see Introduction). It is thus clear that the strategies used in the paratextual features I examined earlier were not limited to these liminal elements, but continued in the texts themselves, that were shaped through translation until they acquired the desired features.

This textual work had another important consequence. Critics have highlighted how the *Urania* series was characterized by a certain heterogeneity. Iannuzzi notes that the *Urania* catalogue consisted of a wide range of SF subgenres, as the editor alternated between "la saga spaziale e l'avventura, la storia con elementi paranormali, il romanzo sociologico, e quello umoristico" [the space opera and adventure, stories with paranormal elements, sociological novels and humorous novels] (Iannuzzi, 2014a:39). Lippi points to the wide chronological span that put together novels published in the 1930s with 1950s texts (Lippi, 2015:47). One should ask how such variety could be acceptable, without being confusing. It seems clear to me that translation played a key role also in this respect, by providing a sense of unity and coherence in an otherwise extremely diverse selection of texts.

Another consequence of this textual fusion was the covert connection of *Urania* with target culture texts published in the past that could have arguably be defined by the same neologism, or at least seen as close relatives of the narratives defined by Monicelli as "fantascienza". A study conducted by Gianfranco De Turre has

shown how material presenting stories and themes similar to those contained in the science fiction from America had appeared in many forms and under various labels in Italian periodicals and book series since the nineteenth century: mainly stories of adventures and travel, pitched at children and adults (De Turris, 1995:218-19). While such antecedents were not explicitly acknowledged by these first mediators, the adapted translations can be seen as implicit references to the Italian 'proto-science fiction' of earlier decades.

To conclude, the *Urania* novels appear as a particularly successful combination of the old and the new, glued together thorough translation. In the US the 1950s was the decade of sophisticated magazines such as *Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, whose "ironic satire, allusive wordplay, and ambitious character studies" made them closer to "the kinds of writing that prevailed in the literary mainstream" (Latham, 2009:83). Conversely, Italian readers were offered, and clearly appreciated, an Italian version of SF that enhanced the most wondrous aspects of the genre and, as Lippi points out, was akin to 'fairy tales' (2015:35). The apparent variety of the texts, belonging to different SF sub-genres and periods, was substantially contained thanks to editorial and translation strategies aiming to produce a specific type of science fiction: one grounded in thrilling adventure and mysterious events.

- The magazine *Urania. Avventure nell'universo e nel tempo*: paratextual and textual features

As I stated earlier, together with the book series *I romanzi di Urania*, the magazine *Urania. Avventure nel tempo e nello spazio* also started to be published in November 1952. In fact, this was apparently Monicelli's original project, as his intention was to create a magazine like those he had been receiving from the US, while the book series had been Alberto Mondadori's idea, purely based on commercial reasons (Lippi, 2015:27). Unlike the book-series, the magazine was more akin to the American SF periodicals of the time, both in terms of structure and content. In particular, most stories published came from *Galaxy*, the most popular SF periodical in the US in the 1950s and considered as the leading magazine of the so-called 'social science fiction' (Cf. Luckhurst, 2005:108-10) - a

type of SF considered more 'difficult' (Valla, 1975:358) and 'sophisticated' (Antonello, 2008:116) compared with the narratives published in the book-series. Attebery's description of the type of story that was published in *Galaxy* is indicative of how much the material published in the American magazine differed from the classic science fiction published in the previous decades:

The ambience of a typical *Galaxy* story is smart, edgy, urban, and faintly paranoid (...) Few *Galaxy* stories take place in space. The opening scene, until things get weird, might almost be a *New Yorker* sketch of the same period. (Attebery, 2003:42)

This difference in content and style was also evident in the visual elements of the covers as Ashley highlights when he describes the cover of the first issue, published in October 1950,

The cover itself was fairly bland. Depicting an asteroid scene from Clifford D. Simak's serial 'Time Quarry', there was no action, only stilted characters, and muted colours for the rock. (Ashley, 2005:24)

Excessive drama is deliberately avoided while a minimal amount of science fiction iconography is maintained to indicate the genre identity of the magazine (*Ibid.*). This was possible because, in the US, science fiction was an established genre and the audience was so familiar with its visual vocabulary that few elements were enough to make it recognizable.

However, when we look at the covers of *Urania* we see that these visual cues did not correspond to what the readers would find inside the magazine. As a matter of fact, the covers for both the book series and the magazine were produced by the same artist, Curt Caesar, whose style appears to be particularly suitable to introduce the novels chosen for the book series. As Iannuzzi has pointed out, the dramatic and gaudy colours of the *Urania* novels "danno forma visiva allo spirito eroico, meraviglioso, pioneristico delle scelte testuali" [provide a visual shape to the heroic and adventurous spirit of the pioneering textual choices] (Iannuzzi, 2014a:41). The covers of the book series promised something that readers would find within the book themselves, through texts that had been heavily adapted to

conform to the visual image on the cover. This alignment between paratextual and textual features did not happen in the magazine *Urania*. There was a clear discrepancy between what the cover promised in terms of verbal and visual elements and the stories presented within the magazine. The “dialogic relationship” that paratexts may have with “their main text” (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2002:46) was a contradictory one as while the titles and the covers promised adventure and drama, the story itself delivered another type of content. As had happened with the titles of the book-series, the titles of the short stories published in the magazine were also adapted to sound more ‘sensational’, and were often associated with genres that the audience would have been more familiar with, such as horror and mystery. For example, in the first issue of the magazine, published in November 1952, four out of six stories have titles that are more dramatic and ‘gothic’ than the original ones (see words in bold): “Five Against Venus” (1952) by Philip Latham is rendered as “Tra i **vampiri** di Venere” [Among the Vampires of Venus], “Wailing Wall” (1952) by Roger Dee becomes simply “**Terrore**” [Terror], F.L. Wallace’s “Accidental Flight” (1952) becomes “I **mostri**” [The monsters] and “Shipshame Home” by Richard Matheson is rendered as “L’**impossibile** fuga” [The impossible escape].

A tendency to adaptation was also evident in the translation of the stories as reported by some critics. Vegetti writes that Monicelli, who was generally the translator, “non andava molto per il sottile, alcuni pezzi sono parenti solo per caso degli originali” [did not mince matters, some parts are only casually related to the originals] (Vegetti, 2001). It is possible that changes were also made at a structural level, as highlighted by Lippi when he reports that the ending of Fritz Lieber’s “Yesterday House” (1952), published in the first issue of the magazine *Urania* as “La casa del passato” [The House of the Past], was changed in the translation (Lippi, 2015:29). On the other hand, in spite of what Vegetti and Lippi say, it is likely that, as the short stories offered less opportunity for radical editorial interventions, the changes in the translations were not sufficient to turn the texts into material able to compete with the colourful adventures of the book-series that, as I previously argued, managed to combine the elements of the new genre of science fiction with those of the established popular genres in the target culture. As Lefevere noted

The genre that is dominant in the target culture defines to a great extent the readers' horizon of expectation with regard to the translated work that tries to take its place in the target culture. If it does not conform to the demands of the genre that dominates the target culture its reception is likely to be rendered more difficult (Lefevere, 1992a:92)

Thus, the failure of the *Urania* magazine was not so much or not only due to its higher level of sophistication but, more likely, to its distance from the genres of popular literature that dominated the Italian system of popular culture at the time.

- *Urania's imitators: I romanzi del cosmo*

In the two decades that followed the 'birth' of science fiction in Italy, other magazines and book-series of varying success appeared in the Italian newsstands. Some initially imitated the *Urania* formula but, from the early 1960s, new publications emerged and started to challenge the model established by the Mondadori periodical.

Among the imitators, the most significant was the pocketbook series *I romanzi del cosmo*, launched in 1957 and published by Milan-based publisher Ponzoni, under the editorship of Giorgio Monicelli, who appeared under the pseudonym of Tom Arno. The imitative nature of this book-series has been highlighted by Iannuzzi, who lists the many elements that were copied from *Urania*, indicating its explicit intent of attracting the latter's readership, particularly the younger section since their textual and paratextual elements show a penchant for "una fantascienza avventurosa e d'azione (...) Prova ne sono anche i titoli, che mettono in evidenza l'elemento meraviglioso delle trame e talvolta quello della *suspense* e del rischio" [an adventurous and action-filled science fiction (...) The titles also demonstrating this, as they highlight the elements of wonder in the plots and sometimes those of suspense and risk] (Iannuzzi, 2014a:88). *I romanzi del cosmo* is clearly a *Urania* competitor of lower quality, with several flaws in terms of editorial accuracy, possibly caused by its low budget. Financial constraints were also the reason why the series published a significant number of Italian authors, writing under English pseudonyms. Their presence does not seem to have led to lower sales, which indicates that readers did not make a distinction between Italian and foreign

science fiction (Iannuzzi, 2014a:92). This lack of discernment is interesting because, as Iannuzzi herself notices, there was at least one aspect that differentiated the two: the quality of the language in the Italian novels was better than that of many translations (Iannuzzi, 2014a:113). Since these were, according to Cozzi, “talmente astruse e incomprensibili che parevano scritte in un'altra lingua” [so abstruse and incomprehensible that they seemed to have been written in another language] (Cozzi, 1978:61), it appears that readers did not particularly care for the quality of what they were reading as long as its content met their demand for entertainment. This is in agreement with what Iannuzzi states regarding the target readership of collections such as *Urania* and *I romanzi del cosmo* “as consisting mostly of young people and/or people with a limited education” (Iannuzzi, 2018). This lack of perception on the part of the readership, however, would change towards the early 1960s when new agents of mediation appeared on the scene, challenging the editorial policy and model of Mondadori's SF series.

- The innovators: *The Science Fiction Book Club*

One of the most interesting book-series that characterised the development of SF in the 1960s was *The Science Fiction Book Club* (1963-1979), also known as *SFBC*, a collection that is usually mentioned in very favourable terms in earlier accounts of science fiction in Italy (for example Curtoni, 1978:204). The *SFBC* was initially just a mail-order book series published by La Tribuna, a small publisher in the northern town of Piacenza which was already publishing the magazine *Galassia* (1961-1979). Initially edited and translated by Roberta Rambelli, a well-known SF author and translator, the series was quite different from the popular collections of science fiction such as *Urania* and *I romanzi del cosmo*. Its paratextual features for example were more akin to those of “mainstream” literature than the average SF book, its general appearance was more sophisticated, the translations were unabridged, even the higher price set it apart from other SF publications (Iannuzzi, 2014a:177). Iannuzzi also notes that the *SFBC*'s covers, with their reproduction of abstract images on a white background, seem to have been inspired by the distinctive style of the prestigious series *I coralli*, published by Einaudi between the 1940s and 1950s, which featured the reproduction of a work

of art on a white background (*Ibid.*). While it is true that, as Ferretti states, the Einaudi cover art had come to be perceived as a particularly refined way of presenting literary works and had been imitated by many (Ferretti, 2004:36), it seems strange that the publishing conventions of ‘high’ literature would be ‘transferred’ to the field of popular literature without any intermediate element. It seems to me that this intermediate element might have been the anthology of translated science fiction *Le meraviglie del possibile*, published by Einaudi and which, as I will discuss in the next chapter, reproduced the features of Einaudi’s mainstream book-series in the layout of the anthology.

The ‘literary’ quality of the *SFBC* book-covers was enhanced by the titles that, compared with those of *Urania* are much less ‘sensational’ and syntactically closer to the original titles. A selection of titles published in the first few years of the series shows these features (Table 2):

Table 2 – Translation of titles in the book-series SFBC

	English title	Italian translation	Back Translation
1	The end of the beginning (Ray Bradbury, 1959)	La fine del principio (1963, tr. Roberta Rambelli)	The end of the beginning
2	Empire of the Atom (A. Van Vogt, 1947)	L'impero dell'atomo (1963)	The empire of the atom
3	The Silver Eggheads (F. Lieber, 1961)	Le argentee teste d'uovo (1964)	The Silver Eggheads
4	A Canticle For Leibowitz (W. Miller Jr., 1959)	Un cantico per Leibowitz (1964)	A Canticle for Leibowitz
5	Lost on Venus (E.R. Burroughs, 1933)	Perduti su Venere (1964)	Lost on Venus
6	The Golden Apples of the Sun (R. Bradbury, 1953)	Le auree mele del sole (1964)	The golden apples of the sun
7	Primal Urge (Brian Aldiss, 1961)	La lampada del sesso (1964)	The lamp of sex
8	Stranger in a Strange Land (R. Heinlein, 1961)	Straniero in Terra straniera (1964)	Stranger in a foreign land
9	The Beast (Van Vogt, 1950)	La città immortale (1965)	The immortal city
10	The Sirens of Titan (K. Vonnegut, 1959)	Le sirene di Titano (1965)	The sirens of Titans

Changes to the titles tend to be minimal and when more radical changes are made, these use a more literary register and evoke poetic images. The adjective “auree” for example is a literary synonym of the more standard and literal “dorate”

(Example 6). In the two cases where the titles are completely rewritten, *Primal urge* translated as *La lampada del sesso* [The Lamp of sex] and *The Beast* changed into *La città immortale* [The immortal city], the Italian titles evoke images that are somewhat less dramatic and slightly more elegant than the original titles.

The books were clearly addressed to a readership able to recognise and appreciate the higher 'literariness' of the series, although its print run of about 3000 copies per book (Iannuzzi, 2014a:177) indicates that this interpretation of science fiction was still limited to a small enclave of readers. It was only in the early 1970s that this more sophisticated version of science fiction would have a certain amount of success, with the launch of new book-series that would replicate and develop the *SFBC* model. Ugo Malaguti, founder of the publishing house Libra in 1967, had been co-editor of *SFBC* for a while (Valla, 1975:362) and probably imported the features of the latter in the first of these new series of which he was publisher and editor, the *Slan* and *I Classici della fantascienza*. The way in which these series contributed to the creation of a new image of SF in the 1970s will be discussed in Chapter IV, but it is worth noting the *SFBC* may be considered the forerunner of the hardbound and sophisticated SF series published in the 1970s.

2.3 The critical reception of science fiction

The science fiction magazines and book series published between the 1950s and 1960s that I reviewed in the previous sections constitute a sort of implicit critical statement regarding the way in which science fiction was conceived by publishers and editors. More explicit ideas about the genre were expressed by some critics and intellectuals who published in the same period of time essays and books containing critical evaluations of science fiction. In the following sections, I will present an overview of these ideas with the aim of identifying key points of the general discourse about science fiction that emerged in these two decades and which, I argue, contributed to shaping the way in which science fiction developed in the 1970s.

The selection of the texts to be examined was initially compiled from surveys of Italian science fiction criticism as listed in Carlo Pagetti (1979; 1986), Domenico Gallo (1986) and Salvatore Proietti (2002). From these, I chose those texts I identified as more significant and which testified to the general climate around science fiction. I have not included in my review the critical pieces that appeared in the SF magazines. This is firstly because such texts were, at least initially, not so much critical pieces but informative material (see Pagetti, 1979). Secondly, my purpose in this section is not to present an exhaustive review of science fiction criticism in Italy, but to give an account of a general climate, of how critics approached science fiction at the beginning of its development and also to identify those elements that can be seen as distinctive of the way in which science fiction was “accommodated” within Italian culture.

It must, however, be noted that the quality of criticism within SF magazines increased with time. Carlo Pagetti for example reports on how the critical pieces published in the magazine *Gamma* (1965-1968), for which he himself started writing as an undergraduate student, were of a higher standard (Pagetti, 1979). On the other hand, since it appears that *Gamma* had scarce circulation (Vegetti, 2001) and, hence, visibility, it is not likely that it had a great impact on the development of SF in the 1960s. In any case, since its most important collaborators continued their activity well into the following decade, when their most important work took place³⁰, I will deal with them in a later part of this project.

Critical work on science fiction in Italy was limited until the 1960s. Only the well-known critic and poet Sergio Solmi offered a critical contribution within a context characterized, as Carlo Pagetti puts it, by “dull commentary and utter silence” (1979). This was not surprising, as the lack of interest of intellectuals for science fiction was typical of those times and extended to most forms of popular culture or “cultura di massa” [mass culture], the term mostly used in Italy to refer to industrially-produced cultural products. In this respect, Andrea Rondini stresses how in the 1950s there was a strong feeling of mistrust towards “scritture di

³⁰ Carlo Pagetti mentions as collaborators of *Gamma* Riccardo Valla who would become an editor and translator with publisher Nord, Gianfranco de Turrís and Sebastiano Fusco who would create SF book series with publisher Fanucci, Vittorio Curtóni and Gianni Montanari who wrote books about SF and worked as editors and translators for important magazines.

consumo” [writings for consumption] which were seen as purely commercial products, devoid of the noble qualities of “authentic art” often analysed in terms of high moral standards (Rondini, 2002:164).

This rejection of popular culture was mainly due to a notion of *culture* associated with “high arts” and a “humanist intellectual tradition” (Forgacs and Lumley, 1996:3-4), which in Italy was especially linked to philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), whose influence would last well into the 1960s. In the post-war years, not only Crocian intellectuals but also Marxist thinkers expressed diffidence towards mass cultural forms, seen mainly as a product of US capitalism and perceived as being manipulative, created by a minority for consumption by a majority (Baranski and Lumley, 1990:10-11). This particular elitist perception of culture had been identified as problematic by Italian philosopher and critic Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) as early as the 1930s, in his writings about culture and literature composed during his years of incarceration under fascism. In these texts, he also noted how the detachment of intellectuals and writers from ordinary people had not allowed the development of a national popular literature - unlike what had happened in France or England - causing the need for Italian people to resort to foreign popular literature (Gramsci, 1987:128-133).

The posthumous publication of Gramsci’s work between 1948 and 1951 by Einaudi, with a series of thematic volumes entitled *Quaderni del carcere*³¹, had a great impact on Italian culture in the 1950s and 1960s and placed the question of the lack of a national popular literature in Italy at the centre of the cultural debate. Gramsci’s notion of “nazionale-popolare” was, in fact, part of a wider project of political and cultural renovation, led by intellectuals capable of mediating between high art and the cultural needs and tastes of the lower classes (Spinazzola, 1987:111). Italian intellectuals, however, did not interpret Gramsci’s ideas as an invitation to look at all forms of ‘culture’, high and low, nor did they attempt a synthesis. If anything, as Forgacs and Lumley note (1996:4), “the link between culture, intellectuals and book-learning” continued to be strong and persisted even after 1968, during the years of the youth protest.

³¹For this research I used the edition published by Editori Riuniti in 1987, particularly Vol. III entitled *Letteratura e vita nazionale*.

From this perspective, it is clear that science fiction was for most critics just another mass product coming from America and, at the same time - given the genre's usual association with science and technology - as something quintessentially American, a symbol of a modernity that both fascinated and scared Italians³². This aspect is generally highlighted by the Italian critics and intellectuals who dealt with science fiction in the 1950s and 1960s, who tended to regard the origin of the genre in America as 'natural', given the advanced state of US science and technology. At the same time, it is possible to hypothesize that some critics saw in science fiction a way of dissecting the problems and ambiguities of modern life, which in the post-war years was generally identified with the values and way of life of the US. In their writing we rarely find definitions, as science fiction was not so much discussed from a literary point of view but from a sociological one.

Often referred to as a "phenomenon", the main curiosity concerned the reasons for its popularity, its emergence perceived as a 'sign of the times' and a reflection of the fears and anxieties of ordinary people in the face of a world that had gone through radical changes. As I have discussed in the Introduction, Italy itself was, in the 1950s and 60s, right at the centre of the economic and social transformations, known as the "Economic Miracle", the major effect of which was to turn the country's rural economy into an industrial one (see Ginsborg, 1990:210-253). As I will show, in some of the writings about science fiction by these critics, it is possible to detect a preoccupation going beyond uncertainties regarding the arrival in the country of a "foreign" popular genre considered of dubious literary quality. The world represented in science fiction was a possible future world, an Americanized version of what perhaps was in store for Italy itself.

The essays I selected for this analysis are, in order of publication:

³²The attitude of Italians as well as other Europeans towards the US had been, since the 19th century, characterized by a range of sentiments, negative and positive, that have been defined as "Americanism" (Americanismo) and "Antiamericanism" (Antiamericanismo), but it was particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century that such feelings strengthened as American mass cultural products flooded Europe and the US projected themselves as a sociopolitical and economic model to be imported (Bonazzi, 2006). For an extensive discussion of Americanism and Antiamericanism in Italy and Europe in the postwar years see P. Craveri et al. eds. *L'americanismo in Italia e in Europa nel secondo dopoguerra*, 2004.

- 1953 -Divagazioni sulla science fiction, l'utopia e il tempo, Sergio Solmi
- 1959 -Ancora sulla fantascienza, Sergio Solmi
- 1961 -Alla ricerca delle radici storiche e psicologiche del racconto di fantascienza,
Laura Conti
- 1961 -SF Americana ovvero l'ideologia del possibile, Augusto Illuminati
- 1962 -La fantascienza, Lino Aldani
- 1964 -Sulla fantascienza, Umberto Eco
- 1965 -La fantascienza e i suoi miti, Gillo Dorfles

In the following sections, I will summarise their main points, highlighting their significant elements in relation to a discourse about science fiction.

- Sergio Solmi

Sergio Solmi (1899-1981) was the first Italian intellectual to evaluate critically science fiction, publishing an essay on the subject as early as 1953. A second essay appeared as the Preface of an anthology of translated science fiction, *Le meraviglie del possibile*, published by Einaudi in 1959. Both essays would be re-printed in later collections, together with other texts on similar themes. The first collection was published in 1971 by Ricciardi with the title *Della favola, del viaggio e di altre cose. Saggi sul fantastico*. The second would be published in 1978 by Einaudi with the definitive title of *Saggi sul fantastico*.

The first essay, "Divagazioni sulla science fiction, l'utopia e il tempo" [Divagations on science fiction, utopia and time] appeared for the first time in the left-wing literary journal *Nuovi Argomenti*, whose editors included Antonio Moravia and Pier Paolo Pasolini.

By the time Solmi published this article, he was already a well-known figure on the Italian cultural scene. A friend of poet Eugenio Montale, he had already published studies of French literature and collections of his own poetry (Foà, 1992:522). Pagetti defines him as an "irregular scholar" (1979) and Proietti as a non-integrated intellectual (2002:162), a status demonstrated by his interest in science fiction at a time when such an interest was likely to be met with outright hostility, if not even

ridicule, as he states himself in his first essay “Parlare di *science-fiction* significa, per il letterato italiano di oggi, superare notevoli resistenze interne”³³. (Solmi, 1978:51)

Solmi explains that his ‘encounter’ with science fiction happened when he read reviews of SF anthologies in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which were followed by talks with Giorgio Monicelli who, as the editor of *Urania*, was at the time the accepted authority on science fiction, and who encouraged Solmi to write about it (Solmi, 1978:xxi-xxii).

Sergio Solmi is seen as the ‘pioneer’ of science fiction criticism in Italy and the representative of the literary establishment who helped to ‘legitimize’ science fiction from a cultural point of view, although his first essay does not seem to have provoked much response (Proietti, 2002:162). It is likely that, of the two essays, it was the second which was more widely read and the most influential, as it was the introduction of a popular anthology. In this section, I will focus mainly on his initial essay. The second, which reiterates many elements from the first essay will be dealt with in Chapter III, as part of the material analysed in the anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile*.

- The monsters of reason: science, science fiction and the end of civilization

Sergio Solmi’s first essay is a long piece of critical writing, loosely divided into four sections, where the author examines the social and historical origin of Science Fiction, the SF narrative structures and its connections with other popular genres, some typical themes of science fiction and its relationship with classic utopia, concluding with the relationship between SF and other twentieth century’s artistic forms.

It starts with a somewhat disconsolate view of the modern world, that Solmi, quoting Paul Valery and Ortega y Gasset, defines as a “mondo chiuso” (Solmi,

³³ [To talk about *science fiction* means, for today’s Italian man of letters, overcoming a remarkable internal resistance.]

1978:45), a closed world characterised by a “clima chiuso e congestionato” (Solmi, 1978:46). The “closure” is both geographical and temporal. Geographical because nowadays the world has lost all its mystery, there are no undiscovered areas left. Solmi ironically juxtaposes the past world of adventure with the trivial and prosaic contemporary world of mass tourism and luxury exotic resorts. Interestingly, the past world that he evokes is, in fact, an imaginary place itself, made up of real and literary places

Oggi, allo spirito d'avventura dei pionieri sembra ormai essersi sostituito il gusto escursionistico degli sportivi, le isole primordiali dei Melville e degli Stevenson si sono trasformate in villeggiature per miliardari, il Polo sarà presto sorvolato da viaggiatori muniti di regolare biglietto³⁴ (*Ibid.*).

In addition, this “closed world” may temporally end and cease to exist, as the atomic explosion in Hiroshima placed a huge question mark over the destiny of humanity (*Ibid.*). In Solmi's description, “technological progress” is seen as mostly responsible for this state of affairs. Science has caused the rise of monsters that humanity will have to defeat in order to survive.

The last sentence of the paragraph resonates with the finality of a tombstone: “Tutte le vie sembrano chiuse in un mondo chiuso, e l'uomo, come rare volte nella sua storia, ha la sensazione di camminare in punta di piedi.”³⁵ (*Ibid.*). The metaphor used by Solmi, which clearly refers to the fear of human annihilation by atomic weapons, is an image that recalls ancient legends and myths, with the protagonists walking silently as not to awake the monster. It is a metaphor that foreshadows what Solmi says a little later, when he compares science fiction with “fiabe” [fairy tales], defining SF as a sort of modern “sinistro folklore” [sinister folklore]³⁶ (Solmi, 1978:47). Solmi borrows this definition from Philip Wylie³⁷, sharing also Wylie's idea that science fiction has a social origin, as it is seen as a “sindrome nevrotica

³⁴ [Today the spirit of adventure of the pioneers seems to have been replaced by the excursionist spirit of sportsmen, the primeval islands of Melville and Stevenson have turned them into resorts for millionaires, the Pole will soon be flown over by travellers with a regular ticket.]

³⁵ [All routes seem closed in a closed world, and human beings, as seldom happened in their history, feel they are walking on tiptoes.]

³⁶ The idea of science fiction as a form of modern folklore is attributed to Jacob Bronowski who “christened sf as ‘the folklore of the atomic age’” (Ashley, 2000:206).

³⁷ Philip Wylie is one of the writers contributing to the volume *Modern Science-Fiction. Its Meaning and Its Future. A Symposium*, edited by Reginald Bretnor, one of the first books to discuss science fiction as a literary form.

del corpo sociale americano” [neurotic syndrome within American society] (*Ibid.*). Solmi, however, widens the chronological span from which SF originated: according to him, the rise of science fiction is not a response to a current contingency but was inevitable, given the development of science and technology in the twentieth century. Like other critics, he also considers it inevitable that science fiction developed in America, since it is there that technology has reached its highest potential.

But, in contrast with other critics, Solmi considers science fiction as another facet of fantasy literature, whose production he links to particular phases of human history, specifically to times of great transformations, to periods characterized by what can be termed as a “paradigm shift”. He uses as an example the success of the Renaissance romance in Europe in the fifteenth century, which emerged at a time of great transformation, i.e. the discovery of a New World across the ocean and the consequent effect of destabilization of the current system of values. In the same way that the fantasies of the Renaissance romances accompanied Cortez and Pizarro to the coasts of America, the extrapolations of the “rapsodie atomiche” [atomic rhapsodies], as Solmi (1978:49) calls SF stories, accompany the conquests of modern physics and technology. This parallelism was generally well received by the critics who later wrote about science fiction, although some expressed disagreement, for example Augusto Illuminati who criticizes its usefulness. The latter, however, does not consider that Solmi faced the difficult task of explaining the peculiar characteristics of science fiction to a readership who hardly knew SF. The analogy with folklore seems a good way to explain science fiction’s “communal” features - the formation of a network of themes and motifs whose origins are difficult to identify and are created through the contribution of different individuals, something that Solmi (1978:55) defines as a “utopia collettiva” [collective utopia].

After describing the main features of SF from a social and historical point of view, Solmi deals with its narrative structures identifying the common traits between SF and other popular genres, such as crime fiction and the adventure novel, from which SF borrows some basic narrative forms. He offers convincing and vivid

explanations of the relationship between SF and these other genres, for example saying that

Fra l'incontro con una tigre nella giungla e quello con un ragno gigante nelle foreste piovose di Venere, tra il naufragio di un veliero su di un'isola deserta e quello di una nave spaziale su di un remoto pianeta della Galassia, non esiste alcuna sostanziale differenza quanto a situazione narrativa: si tratta di un semplice ampliamento topografico dei margini.³⁸ (Solmi, 1978:58)

Solmi also argues very clearly on the supposed predictive capacities of science fiction, as he distinguishes between scientific and historical prediction. The illusion that the future can be predicted is essentially based on a systematic confusion between scientific prediction – which is possible on the basis of knowing physical laws – and historical prediction (which is much more difficult) (Solmi, 1978:60-62). But even scientific prediction can take place up to a point, since while it is possible to envisage amazing technological developments, it is impossible to predict which exact shape and specific technology will be used in the end. To explain this concept, he refers to H.G. Wells's novel *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899)³⁹ where Wells correctly predicts that future wars will be fought in the air, but the handguns used by the pilots are clearly a projection of Wells's times. In the same line, Solmi points out other incongruences that are sometimes found in science fiction stories, such as the existence of an extremely poor and undernourished underclass within a civilization with a high degree of industrial development. Something like this is unlikely to happen because, Solmi argues, technological development requires an increasing degree of specialised staff and machines replacing menial jobs (Solmi, 1978:61). In the end, he concludes, what must be noted is not the ability of science fiction to predict the future but science fiction itself, its emergence as a sign of the future, its irrational mysticism something that has replaced religion in opening up "le vie sterminate del sogno" [the endless routes of fantasy] and leading to "visioni delle palingenesi future" [visions of future regenerations] (Solmi, 1978:63).

³⁸ [There is no substantial difference in narrative terms between encountering a tiger in the jungle and a giant spider in Venus's rainy forests, between a shipwreck on a desert island and that of a spaceship on a remote planet of the Galaxy: it is a mere topographical widening of the borders of adventure.]

³⁹ A revised edition was published by H.G. Wells in 1910 with the title *The Sleeper Awakes*.

In the final section, Solmi associates science fiction with other contemporary trends in the arts and indicates how SF can be seen as the popular translation of surrealism, through the works of Dalí, Miró, Tanguy which are “prefigurazioni delle creature mostruose, degli oggetti e dei panorami extraterrestri che gli scrittori di *science fiction* ci propinano” (Solmi, 1978:68)⁴⁰. A sign, according to Solmi, that under the twentieth century’s apparent rationalism there is a “fondo confuso e informe di visioni terrifiche e irrazionali” [confused and shapeless layer of irrational and terrifying visions]. (*Ibid.*).

In the final part of his essay Solmi goes back to the main points of his evaluation, to the idea of science fiction as the “symptom” of an intolerance for “what exists”, for the “here and now”, which leads to find solace in a new possible world, an ideal space that, like dreams, is characterized by anguish (Solmi, 1978:68-69). In fact, the new utopias of science fiction rarely present us with the perfect places of classic utopias, which are out of history, symmetrical, rational and happy. The fairy tales and fantasies of the most recent science fiction almost always belong to the genre of the anti-utopia, and it is the myth of modern Apocalypse that dominates, especially the one caused by atomic weapons and often by human beings themselves. However

Nonostante le loro ossessioni apocalittiche (...) l’ideale cui s’ispira la maggior parte di questi scrittori, è, sostanzialmente, «progressivo» (...). Così avviene che i meno standardizzati di questi scrittori riprendano quella funzione satirica la quale è l’elemento più efficiente che informa le utopie di ogni tempo. (Solmi, 1978: 72-3)⁴¹

Solmi concludes his essay by aptly quoting the last line from Dante’s *Inferno*, expressing the hope that science fiction will be able to bring myth and fairy tales back into the body of literature, currently stifled by the “infernali realistici” [hells of realism], and to make people “see the stars again” (Solmi, 1978:77).

⁴⁰ [Foreshadowing of the monstrous creatures, the objects and the extraterrestrial landscapes that *science fiction* writers serve us up.]

⁴¹ [In spite of their obsession for the apocalypse (...) the ideal inspiring most of these writers, is, basically, «progressive» (...). It so happens that the less standardized ones among these writers take up again that satirical function which is the most effective element of utopias of all times.]

One striking aspect of Solmi's essay is the recurrence of particular metaphors that contribute to strengthen his ideas about a science that has gone awry. His descriptions of science fiction writers are characterized by words that evoke both an idea of insane fantasy and mechanical devices. For example, he talks of "delirante sprigionamento di sogni ad occhi aperti" [delirious eruption of day-dreaming], "folli prospezioni di mondi a venire" [crazy prospecting of future worlds], "un'esplosione «a catena» di scariche fantastiche" [a «chain» explosion of fantastic discharges] (Solmi, 1978:47). Words such as "sprigionamento", "esplosione a catena", "scarica" are typically used in scientific and technological contexts. Their collocation with words referring to unbridled fantasy, bordering on madness, evoke those literary figures that in the collective imagination have become the symbols of 'irresponsible science', from Faust, to Frankenstein to the more recent 'mad scientists' of much SF. In turn, this establishes a link between fantasy and reality, between the writers of science fiction, who are often scientists and technicians, and their imaginary creations. This is then strengthened by a further parallel, when Solmi states that the same concepts of modern physics, from relativity theory, to the ideas of space as curved and dilatable and an expanding universe, may appear as "delirante fiaba" [delirious fairy tales] (Solmi, 1978:55), establishing an implicit correspondence between real scientists and mad scientists.

A similar deep worry about scientific development and its ensuing changes was expressed in a more explicit way in another essay, originally published in 1954, which was also included in *Saggi sul fantastico*. Entitled *Un'ombra sulla civiltà delle machine* [A shadow on the civilization of machine], it comments on Robert Jungk's famous book *Tomorrow is Already Here* (1954), which had been translated into Italian in the same year by Einaudi as *Il futuro è già cominciato*. Solmi here expresses his preoccupation about the way in which technological development was greatly upsetting social structures. For example, after recalling Marx's words on how technological innovations bring changes into the social structure⁴², Solmi wonders which changes the "mulino atomico" [the atomic mill] will bring into the

⁴² Marx's original statement was "The windmill gives you society with the feudal lord: the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist". Quoted in Daniel Chandler's online article "Technological or Media Determinism". Available at:

<http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/tecdet/tdet02.html?COLLCC=2319443620&>

world “La pace e il socialismo universali, o la distruzione del mondo?” [Universal peace and socialism, or world destruction?] (Solmi, 1978:107). This theme will be further developed in Chapter III, where I discuss the narrative material chosen for the anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile*. In the present discussion, it is useful to contextualize better Solmi’s interpretation of science fiction and, particularly, his definition of science fiction as “atomic folklore” and a form of modern fairy tale.

It is not quite clear why Solmi comes out with this particular analogy. In her exhaustive study of the development of science fiction in Italy, Giulia Iannuzzi suggests that Solmi’s interpretation of science fiction as a form of fantasy is closer to the French tradition on science fiction criticism than Anglo-Saxon criticism, which is more interested in identifying technical and scientific verisimilitude in SF (Iannuzzi, 2011-12:43), a preference that can be explained by Solmi’s familiarity with French literature. Another contributing factor, which I present here as merely hypothetical, could be a sort of ‘cultural collision’, a perceived affinity between science fiction and the fairy tale as the latter was going through a phase of renewed interest in Italy in the 1950s. As a matter of fact, the first collection of Italian fairy tales, edited by Italo Calvino, was published in 1956 by Einaudi.

Although Sergio Solmi assumed a humble attitude in relation to his reflections on science fiction, describing himself as a ‘profano’ (a non-expert reader), and choosing a non-committal title for his essay (‘divagazione’ means ‘digression’ in Italian and in literary terms could be paraphrased as ‘idle thoughts’, a word that stresses their random, occasional character), his thoughts on science fiction attracted increasing attention in the following decades, albeit with few disagreeing views. In the late 1970s, Giuliano Spagnul, one of the founders of the left-wing magazine *Un’Ambigua Utopia*, stated that *Saggi sul fantastico* was the most important work of science fiction criticism published in Italy, not only because of its methodological value, but also because Solmi was the first to stress the link between science fiction and reality in his 1953 essay (Spagnul, 1979:246). This is something also highlighted by Teresa De Lauretis, who notes how Solmi understood that science fiction was not so much about the future but “una riflessione logico-conoscitiva sul presente come intersezione storica di passato e futuro” [a logical and cognitive reflection about the present as a historical

intersection of the past and the future] (De Lauretis, quoted in Spagnul, 1979:246). As I shall discuss in the part of the thesis focusing on science fiction in the 1970s, this was a crucial element of the way in which science fiction was interpreted in that decade, as a tool of social criticism to investigate the present.

- Augusto Illuminati and Laura Conti: a “political” interpretation of science fiction?

In spite of its later fortune, in the immediate aftermath Solmi’s essay was largely ignored and started to be widely discussed only in the early 1960s, with the publication in 1961 of two essays about science fiction, respectively by Laura Conti and Augusto Illuminati - two intellectuals described by Pagetti as “concretely engaged in political activity with the Italian Communist Party” (Pagetti, 1979). As a matter of fact, the political connotation of their texts is quite evident: while maintaining the sociological perspective adopted by Solmi, their discussion of science fiction’s origins, success and themes has a pronounced left-wing perspective. Science fiction is perceived as a cultural appendage of the United States’ political and economic system, and, as such, unable to express a real alternative representation of the social order, even in its more critical texts.

While these essays do not provide a particularly innovative perspective to the study of science fiction, they testify to the interest in the genre among some left-wing critics and intellectuals of the time and foreshadow the interweaving of science fiction with political discourse in the following decade.

- Laura Conti: science fiction as the divorce of science from imagination

Laura Conti⁴³, a scientist and political activist, wrote an article on science fiction published in 1961, in the February issue of the political journal *Problemi del socialismo*. The inclusion of an article of this kind in a journal mainly concerned with conventional political issues is interesting as it can be taken as a sign of a

⁴³ Laura Conti (1921-1993) took part in the Resistenza and was arrested during the war. After the war she became a doctor and a political activist within the Italian Communist Party. (Information provided by the entry on Laura Conti by Renata Borgato in *Enciclopedia delle donne*. Available at: <http://www.enciclopediadelledonne.it/biografie/laura-conti/>

wider interest in science fiction at the time, an aspect mentioned by Gillo Dorfles a few years later (Dorfles, 1965:208).

The title of her essay, “Alla ricerca delle radici storiche e psicologiche del racconto di fantascienza” [In search of the historical and psychological roots of the science fiction story], echoes that of Vladimir Propp’s famous work *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate* that had been published by Einaudi in 1949. Indeed Conti, like Solmi, conceives of science fiction as a form of modern fairy tale, but a fairy tale with roots in the present. It is undeniable that she looks at science fiction especially as a barometer of sociological change, a type of narrative that, following Solmi’s reasoning, may be steeped in myths and folklore, but which also reflects “la breve giornata in cui si vive” [the short day in which one lives] (Conti, 1961:188), the particular historical moment.

Laura Conti’s essay contains many parallels with Solmi’s ideas. For example, she identifies the lack of understanding of science by ordinary people as one of the reasons for the birth of science fiction. This, she argues, explains the tendency to think of the ‘consequences’ of science rather than of science itself (Conti, 1961:171). At the same time, ignorance about science has been accompanied by the ‘popularisation’ of technological knowledge. The rise of science fiction stems from these two aspects⁴⁴. In the same way, she echoes Solmi’s ideas of the “closed world” when, recognising the connection between science fiction and the utopian tradition, she states that science fiction must be located in the future or on another planet, as there are no unknown places left on the Earth.

The most interesting aspect of Conti’s discussion however lies in how she considers science fiction from a political perspective. She begins by saying that the world generally found in SF stories is described in terms of a social, political and economic utopia, with no poverty, no hunger, no class struggle, no racism, no

⁴⁴ Nel carattere della scienza moderna e nella sua inaccessibilità all’immaginazione, da una parte; e dall’altra nello squilibrio tra la divulgazione della tecnica e quella della scienza, possiamo riconoscere due delle radici del fenomeno della fantascienza (Conti, 1961:171-2) [We can recognise two of the roots of the science fiction phenomenon: both in the character of modern science and in its inaccessibility to the imagination, and in the imbalance between the dissemination of technology and the dissemination of science.]

sexism. A world where almost everyone has a nice state job, with a good salary, a beautiful home, and where there are no more nation states, only international technical committees (Conti, 1961:178)⁴⁵. It is therefore a world “perfettamente organizzato, tecnicamente efficiente, tranquillamente democratico” [perfectly organised, technically efficient, easily democratic] (*Ibid.*), from where all traditional moral problems have disappeared. While Conti admits that this ‘perfect’ world clearly corresponds to something that people aspire to - “un sogno collettivo, sano e innocente, di vita comoda e senza problemi” [a collective dream, healthy and innocent, about a comfortable and safe life] (Conti, 1961:179) - it is, nonetheless, a world with no specific references to historical or political elements.

One of the most negative aspects of SF, Conti states, is that although the world portrayed by science fiction is the realisation of a utopia, even a socialist one, it is not clear how it has come about (later in her essay, when talking of Russian SF she observes that even science fiction written in the Soviet Union is deprived of historical references⁴⁶). Even worse, she continues, there are hints that this new democratic world came about by substituting scientists for politicians (Conti, 1961:184). This is something that she ascribes partly to the American beliefs in the revolution of technicians, but also to the widespread idea that world problems will be solved by science rather than through political struggle

Che la letteratura fantascientifica allarghi a *tutti* i problemi umani la possibilità di una soluzione tecnico-scientifica, dimostra che la grande massa *desidera* che la soluzione di tutti i problemi esca dal terreno politico-sociale e le venga fornita invece da un esercito di scienziati.⁴⁷ (Conti, 1961:185)

⁴⁵ This description appears quite odd since in the 1950s the worlds described in science fiction were more likely to be dystopian societies, rather than utopias. This was certainly the case for many of the stories quoted by Laura Conti, mostly found in the anthology edited by Sergio Solmi.

⁴⁶ With reference to the collection *14 racconti di fantascienza russa* (1961), published by Feltrinelli, she states that many stories “si svolgono *al di fuori* di ogni ambiente sociale o politico, al di fuori di qualsiasi contingenza storica” [they take place *outside* any social or political environment, outside any historical contingency] (Conti, 1961:187).

⁴⁷ [The fact that science fiction literature extends to *all* human problems the possibility of a techno-scientific solution shows that the great mass of people *wishes* that the solution of all problems exit the socio-political terrain and is instead provided by an army of scientists.]

She concludes by stating that this presents us with two dangers. Firstly, people delude themselves by attributing to science more power than it actually has. Secondly, even if problems could be solved by scientists rather than politicians, people would be excluded by the process of formation of the new world, against which they may even feel revulsion and hostility. This danger, Conti states, is sometimes even explicitly stated in SF, for example in narratives where *robots* turn into machines that dominate human beings, who then become estranged from the world itself because

in realtà questo *magnifico nuovo mondo* non è creato *dagli uomini* (come sarebbe se venisse alla luce attraverso una lotta politica) ma da *alcuni uomini*: e perciò agli altri risulta straniero. (Conti, 1961:186)⁴⁸

This state of estrangement is what, according to Conti, fuels a certain type of “luddite” science fiction, which denies the benefits of science and technology in favour of a return to the origins or “stato adamico” [Edenic state] (*Ibid.*). This last comment is interesting, as it indicates how Conti, herself a scientist, does not share Solmi’s mistrust in science and scientists. In fact, it is not so much science that seems to be the problem, but rather the ousting of politics from society, a danger that perhaps she saw as not confined to the fictional world of science fiction but affecting reality as a whole. Thus, it becomes clear why, as she says towards the end of her essay, an examination of science fiction is necessary to understand which phenomena move restlessly unexpressed “nel mondo oscuro del *folklore*, della cultura di massa” [in the murky world of *folklore*, of mass culture] (Conti, 1961:187).

- Augusto Illuminati and American SF

In an essay entitled “Fantascienza Americana ovvero l’ideologia del possibile” [American Science Fiction or the ideology of the possible], published in the December issue of *Il contemporaneo*⁴⁹, sociologist Augusto Illuminati also

⁴⁸ [this *magnificent new world* is not created *by men* (as it would be if it were born out of a political struggle) but by *some men*: and this is why it is foreign to the others.]

⁴⁹ Founded in 1954 by R. Bilenchi, C. Salinari and A. Trombadori, *Il Contemporaneo* was an important Marxist journal that provided a platform to debate ideas on politics, art and culture among

examined science fiction from a political and sociological perspective, with the apparent aim of showing how American SF stories could produce interesting critiques of capitalism, but without being able to offer real alternatives and solutions. Like Conti, and in disagreement with Solmi, Illuminati believes that it may be more productive to look at science fiction as a genre linked to the contingent moment (Illuminati, 1961:66) and, to make this point, he starts by drawing parallels between science fiction and recent past war events.

After stating how current science fiction is much more pessimistic than its nineteenth century precursors, he quotes from Orson Welles's famous 1938 radio drama adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which – according to Illuminati - is a more horrific version of the original text, projecting a much stronger image of the catastrophic effects of the war and the end of civilization. Illuminati quotes the last passage from the play, where the narrator describes the vision of New York in ruins, and then asks “Ma sono le rovine di una New York di cartapesta o le strade di Guernica?” [But are these the ruins of a fictitious New York or are they the streets of Guernica?] (Illuminati, 1961:58). And again, when the narrator wonders if the return to normality is only a reprieve, and nobody knows whether “*altri mostri non stiano già spiandoci, dalle profondità dello spazio*” [*other monsters are not already spying on us from the depths of space*] (Illuminati, 1961:59), Illuminati answers by conflating the fictitious with the real, recalling the terrible events of the recent past with a succession of images where both victors and defeated are shown as contributing to the general destruction

Verranno, e avranno uniformi di SS, rossi berretti di paras, e al posto dell'anacronistico «raggio incendiario» le palpabili radiazioni atomiche. E quale innocente oblio, tra le foreste di Auschwitz, nei giardini di Hiroshima...⁵⁰ (*Ibid.*)

After evoking the end of civilization by way of an alien invasion, Illuminati goes on to examine another typical theme of science fiction, the fear of the atomic bomb,

the left-wing intellectuals of the time. Particularly important was the “battle” it conducted in favour of “realism” in the arts. (Asor Rosa, 1992:155)

⁵⁰[They will come, and they will have the uniforms of the SS, the red berets of parachutists, and instead of the anachronistic «heat ray» they will have atomic rays. And what an innocent oblivion, among the forests of Auschwitz, in the garden of Hiroshima.....]

which can be found like “un filo rosso” [a red thread] (*Ibid.*) in most committed science fiction. In these writers, he notes, the end of the world is represented as a responsible and criminal decision by men themselves, while the individual cannot do anything but protest desperately and then flee to another planet (*Ibid.*). But the protest of the individual is part of a more generalized impossibility of controlling things, a general alienation of personality.⁵¹ In a world that is incomprehensible, the only thing that can be understood is its end, “la fine del mondo”, which can also be “il mondo finito” [the finished world]. Even worse, the finished world can also be taken in its literal meaning as “the last frontier of the world”, beyond which the world really ends.

Illuminati here quotes from the short story “Week-end on the Border” by Sidney Ward, which appeared as “Domenica alla frontiera” in the second anthology of science fiction published by Einaudi in 1961, and is a story that, in his opinion, reflects the fear of economic stagnation in the US or of capitalism in general (*Ibid.*). The story in question however, was a pseudotranslation written by Franco Lucentini, the editor of the 1961 anthology with Carlo Fruttero, and perhaps Illuminati’s interpretation is a projection of his own interests and fears, rather than Lucentini’s. In point of fact, Illuminati returns to the image of stagnation in a later paragraph, in relation to another theme that he identifies as very popular, that of the robots. Here he states “Non c’è da stupirsi che nelle società stagnanti, crudeli, integrate che descrivono, più di tutto siano le macchine ciò che autori e protagonisti temono” [It is not surprising that machines are what authors and characters are most afraid of in the stagnant, cruel and integrated societies they describe] (Illuminati, 1961:61). In the figure of the robot, Illuminati sees a symbol of oppression in a capitalistic system, a sort of fantastic reformulation where “il lavoro morto opprime il lavoro vivo, come un vampiro succhia la sua vittima” [dead work oppresses live work, like a vampire sucking its victim] (*ibid.*).

A Marxist perspective is also evident when he wonders why mistrust and fear of machines - which Illuminati considers, wrongly, a constant feature of science fiction

⁵¹ He quotes three short stories by Richard Matheson both published in *Il secondo libro della fantascienza* (1961), *Cronache Marziane* (1954) and *Io sono Helen Driscoll* published by Urania in 1959.

- do not lead towards rebellion, not so much against the machine, but “contro una società disumanata” [a dehumanised society] (*Ibid.*). He provides an answer in the section entitled “Ribellione e morte” [Rebellion and death], where he examines two novels, *The Status Civilization* (1960) by Robert Sheckley and *The Fireman* (1951) by Ray Bradbury⁵². Both, he explains, illustrate the dangers of societies based on the free market and capitalism, or on excessive collectivism and conformity. On the other hand, he warns, there is no indication of a valid political alternative in these texts, because American culture is currently unable to produce such a different vision. As a demonstration of a novel where rebellion against an oppressive society is conceived in terms of class struggle, he cites *The Wild Goose Chase*, by British writer Rex Warren - a dystopian fantasy where a tyrannical government is overthrown in the course of a heroic revolution (Illuminati, 1961:65)⁵³.

Although Illuminati dismisses any real political function for US science fiction (something that he does not say explicitly, but which seems implicit in his argument), he identifies in science fiction a connection with the present, as he sees in SF a response to “concrete esigenze e tendenze di una circoscritta organizzazione sociale” [specific needs and tendencies of a circumscribed social organization] (Illuminati, 1961:66). This is the reason of his rejection of the ‘mythological’ approach adopted by Sergio Solmi and Laura Conti, which he considers too abstract and generic to be of real use. On the contrary, Illuminati’s analysis seeks to identify discursive elements typical of American trends at the time, and he quotes as examples, the “managerial revolution” and Kautsky’s ultra-imperialism (Illuminati, 1961:67).

The overall objective of Illuminati seems to be that of showing the contradictions of American capitalism and its representation in science fiction stories – in which the society depicted, he states, is the rational outcome of capitalism (Illuminati, 1961:74). He concludes by wondering how the protagonists and authors of these

⁵² These were published by Urania respectively in 1961 and 1953, with the titles *Gli orrori di Omega* (Sheckley) and *Gli anni del rogo* (Bradbury). *The Fireman* is the initial shorter version of Ray Bradbury’s famous novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

⁵³ The book was translated into Italian as *Caccia all’oca selvatica* and published by Einaudi in 1953.

stories would assess this state of affairs and asks if there will ever be a rebellion, and of which kind.

- Lino Aldani and “humanistic science fiction”

According to Salvatore Proietti, the publication in 1962 of the first Italian monograph about science fiction by SF writer and editor Lino Aldani (1926-2009) was a ‘turning point’, an indication that “la SF stessa inizia a riflettere su di sé” [SF itself started to reflect upon itself] (Proietti, 2002:163). Unlike previous commentators, Aldani did not belong to the cultural establishment. He was a member of the SF community and is considered one of the most important Italian writers of SF, with several of his works translated into other languages. Aldani started publishing his stories in the 1960s, in the magazine *Oltre il cielo* and in 1963 was one of the founders of *Futuro*, the first Italian magazine completely devoted to Italian writers of SF⁵⁴. The book, published by La Tribuna - a small publisher in Piacenza which also published the magazine *Galassia* - was entitled *La fantascienza. Che cos'è. Come è sorta. Dove tende* [Science fiction. What it is. How it originated. Where it is going] and was aimed at providing an informative and historical portrait of a genre that, as the backcover blurb declares, was “ormai popolare anche in Italia” [by now popular also in Italy]. In spite of its uneven quality, the book enjoys a certain status within the science fiction community and Aldani’s enterprise is considered almost heroic, having been written without the benefit of critical references (Cf. Gallo, 1999). Consisting of twelve chapters, it starts with a review of the definitions of science fiction, followed by sections on the ancestors of SF, the ‘golden age’ science fiction, SF cinema and comics, and Russian SF. Of particular importance is the content of the first chapter, where Aldani offers his own definition of science fiction. He sees the genre as a modern development of fantasy, with its scientific elements purely included for formal reasons, in order to make acceptable to modern people fantastic material that once would have been placed under the labels of fairy tale and myth acceptable (Aldani, 1962:16). He defines science fiction as a fantastic representation of the universe, which is

⁵⁴ See information about Lino Aldani in the special issue dedicated to him in the online SF magazine *Delos*, edited by Emiliano Farinella (no. 26, May 1997). Available at: <https://www.fantascienza.com/326/speciale-lino-aldani>

scientifically and logically coherent and able to place the reader, through an exceptional or impossible situation, in a different relationship with things (Aldani, 1962:17).

The rejection of the idea that the scientific-technological element is an essential aspect of science fiction is at the core of Aldani's discussion of Italian science fiction, in the final chapter. After illustrating the development of the genre among home-grown writers, Aldani notes how Italian science fiction is already showing a certain maturity and cultural specificity, albeit still excessively adhering to foreign models. Among the elements specific to Italian science fiction, he mentions more attention to the human aspects of the story, an ambition to go beyond the technological expedient or clever situations, and a tendency for the "rappresentazione dell'uomo" [representation of man] (Aldani, 1962:141). Thus, Aldani makes the case for an 'Italian way' to science fiction, a mode of writing SF that will later be defined as a 'humanistic science fiction', as it emphasises the human component, the psychology of the characters, as well as ethical and philosophical questions (see Catani, 2013). This feature has been noted by several Italian commentators and can be considered a distinguishing aspect of Italian SF and a demonstration of how the genre of science fiction has been 'domesticated' in relation to the Italian context.

On the other hand Aldani, like others after him, makes no comment about the way in which this aspect may have affected the translations, which constituted the majority of the SF production in Italian at the time. Considering that the same Italian writers who wrote 'humanistic SF' were often also the mediators who edited and translated foreign narratives for the book series and SF magazines, it is likely that this preference for 'humanistic' features affected their choices of titles, and translation strategies. (See Chapter IV).

- Umberto Eco and science fiction as pedagogy

Another authoritative figure who in the first half of the 1960s wrote about science fiction was Umberto Eco, who dedicated a few pages to science fiction in his *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964). This was the first Italian book to approach mass

culture from a critical perspective, stating the need to study popular cultural forms rather than rejecting them as debased forms, and suggesting possible approaches (Eco, 1964:29-64). Although *Apocalittici e integrati* became a seminal book in this respect, the brief part about science fiction is not particularly innovative, as Eco himself admits (Eco, 1964:372). Eco's contribution owes a lot to Sergio Solmi, since he identifies myth and allegory as the basic structures of science fiction. Like others before him, his point of view is mainly sociological, highlighting the ability of SF to deal with themes that are at the core of current debates in literature, criticism and sociology, such as consumerism and racism. While this topical aspect appears to be a positive element, Eco reminds his readers that science fiction remains an industrial product, expressing the "moods" of the masses, which, he seems to imply, are reactionary. As an example, he mentions three stories by Robert Heinlein written during McCarthyism, which contain fascist and racist themes.⁵⁵

An interesting aspect of Eco's evaluation is his stress on the allegorical and educational function of science fiction. Science fiction, he states, is "una letteratura che non può sottrarsi a una funzione pedagogica (...) [ed è] consumata come letteratura di puro intrattenimento" [a literature that cannot help having a pedagogical function (...) [and is] consumed as a literature of mere entertainment] (Eco, 1964:373). This view recalls the idea of science fiction that, as I pointed out in the previous section, was typical of popular book series such as *Urania*, where the guiding principle was 'entertainment' and 'scientific education'. Having said that, it must be noted that Eco's pedagogical function seems to refer more to a 'moral' education than a scientific one.

- Gillo Dorfles and science fiction as new myth

Gillo Dorfles, a renowned art critic and philosopher, wrote about science fiction in a book published in 1965, *Nuovi riti, nuovi miti* – an analysis of new forms of mass culture which he defines as contemporary myths. In the chapter dedicated to science fiction, he discusses the genre as a completely new socio-cultural

⁵⁵ Robert Heinlein is to a certain extent a controversial author. Considered as a brilliant writer, his right-wing political views have nevertheless sometimes attracted a good deal of criticism, particularly in Italy (see relevant entry in Curtioni and Lippi's *Guida alla fantascienza*, 1978:87).

phenomenon, which cannot be related to the past. Science fiction is for Dorflès paradigmatic of people's current existence, a literature that reveals the trends, expectations and fears of today's people (Dorflès, 1965:208).

His critical point of reference is not Solmi, but Kingsley Amis, whose study of sociological science fiction, *The New Maps of Hell* (1960), had been published in 1962 by Bompiani as *Le nuove mappe dell'inferno*.⁵⁶ Dorflès also states that unlike other critics he is not interested in finding literary quality in science fiction but, for his purposes, needs to focus on the worst examples of SF, junk destined to be quickly consumed and forgotten (Dorflès, 1965:209). This is because these are the products that enable us to examine SF's repetitive and 'institutionalized' elements and, more specifically, science fiction as 'myth'. Science fiction developed to fill a void, that Dorflès identifies in the need to believe in the impossible, the paranormal, the superhuman (Dorflès, 1965:210).

The central section of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of these 'constant' elements, that is to say the most typical themes and situations, which Dorflès identifies in space travel, chronological inversions (as in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*), parallel universes, the atomic bomb and mutants, paradoxes (which he points out as being less interesting for him, as these stories are generally more sophisticated and 'literary'), and the encounter with other civilizations, which he considers one of the most interesting aspects of SF. At the core of this anthropological element the same problem persists, as he explains: "si mira a sottolineare la precarietà e la relatività dei nostri sistemi di vita, delle nostre leggi morali e sociali, della nostra arte, del nostro costume" [the aim is to highlight the precariousness and relative aspect of the way in which we live, of our moral and social laws, of our art and customs] (Dorflès, 1965:222). However, this must not be taken as an indication of high moral themes, as Dorflès is at pains to point out, stating that most writers are not even aware of dealing with such crucial issues.

Here, Dorflès clearly espouses the widespread view that consumers and producers of popular literature are often culturally lacking and are not aware of the issues

⁵⁶ Carlo Pagetti tells of how *The New Maps of Hell* had a diverse reception in Italy within the fandom, with both supporters and detractors. (Pagetti, 1979).

involved in their activity. He later notes how not only the authors lack a clear vision of the ethical implications of their stories, but also most readers do not realize that such stories satisfy humanity's unconscious wish to be free from overbearing societal mechanisms. His essay concludes reiterating the value of SF as a contemporary form of myth which has given science a mystical role, turning it into a fetish (Dorfles, 1965:228).

2.4 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to provide an overview of the ways in which science fiction was introduced in the Italian context, how an initial image of the genre was built by its first mediators and how this was followed or challenged by subsequent publishers. The chapter also deals with various critics' responses to the arrival of science fiction, particularly Sergio Solmi, whose role in providing an interpretation of science fiction from a literary perspective was crucial for later critical developments.

Looking at said responses, it is possible to note some common traits. A typical aspect is the difficulty of looking at science fiction as literature. With the obvious exception of Lino Aldani, even Sergio Solmi argues that only a handful of SF texts have any literary value (1978:77), so that the sociological perspective becomes the obligatory choice. In any case, it must be noted that again, apart from Solmi, the other commentators are not strictly literary critics. It is also clear that, beyond individual differences, science fiction is perceived as having a strong connection with the present rather than the future. Consequently, it is taken as a means of examining and 'measuring' – in other words, understanding – the present in its developing lines, as the frequent use of the term 'barometer' shows.

In particular, science fiction seems a common tool through which a number of observations about technological and scientific progress may be made, generally with a negative connotation. Although this same technological and industrial progress was changing very quickly in Italy, providing people with a better life⁵⁷,

⁵⁷ See Paul Ginsborg's report of the way in which a peasant lived in the South in the mid 1950s (1990:212).

the effects of industrialization and the spread of new technology were clearly causing great concern. This feeling is expressed in a number of ways, which are not always explicit. In his essay about Robert Jungk, Sergio Solmi talks of the way of life in the early twentieth century with a note of fondness that strongly contrasts with his description of contemporary life, dominated by science and technology

Quelli di noi che possono rammentare i primi anni del secolo, la superstite illuminazione a petrolio e i viaggi in vettura a cavalli, le serate accanto al caminetto, e il *tub*, hanno il privilegio di rievocare un genere di esistenza e di *comfort* borghese non gran che dissimile da quello su cui un secolo prima (...) un Leopardi poteva ironizzare. (Solmi, 1978:106)⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ [Those of us who can remember the early years of the century, the petrol lamps and travelling by horse drawn coaches, the evenings spent by the fire and the *tub*, have the privilege of recollecting a kind of existence and middle-class *comfort* not much different from the one which in the previous century (...) Leopardi could be ironic about.]

CHAPTER III
LEGITIMIZING SCIENCE FICTION.
AN ANALYSIS OF *LE MERAVIGLIE DEL POSSIBILE*, THE FIRST ITALIAN
ANTHOLOGY OF TRANSLATED SCIENCE FICTION

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the anthology of translated science fiction *Le meraviglie del possibile* (LMDP), published by Einaudi in 1959, and show how it negotiated the image of science fiction offered by popular series such as *Urania*, adding to this image new elements in response to the social and cultural concerns of the time, the end of the 1950s. This anthology is widely considered as a crucial text in legitimising science fiction in Italy, alerting, as Antonello points out, “gli intellettuali italiani dell’esistenza di un nuovo genere” [Italian intellectuals about the existence of a new genre] (Antonello, 2008:108). Antonello’s wording is particularly interesting here because, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, the genre had actually existed and circulated in Italy for a while, so it was not its concrete existence that was in doubt. The problem was that SF did not exist as an accepted literary genre and as a subject worthy of critical interest. The word often used to describe the fundamental act of acknowledgement, after publication of the above anthology is “sdoganamento” (for example Tosello, 2002:27), a term that literally refers to the process of clearing goods through customs, thus highlighting the role played by ‘official’ cultural authorities in granting SF entry into the Italian cultural space.

As I already indicated in the last chapter, *Le meraviglie del possibile* was edited by Sergio Solmi, who also wrote the Preface, and Carlo Fruttero, a future editor of *Urania*. The first in a series of four anthologies, it would become famous as a landmark in the history of Italian science fiction. The prestige of a publisher like Einaudi, one of the “editori-protagonisti”⁵⁹ who shaped cultural life in post-war Italy (Ferretti, 2004: 8) and an editor like Sergio Solmi, a distinguished poet and scholar

⁵⁹ Giancarlo Ferretti (2004:4) defines as “editori-protagonisti” [leading publishers] those publishers whose activity was characterised by a strong personal element and intervention in all the phases of publishing.

of French and Italian literature, provided the anthology with a visibility that was in part instrumental for its critical and commercial success, and ensured its acceptance by the Italian literary establishment. Its impact within Italian culture can be measured not only by the number of positive reviews that appeared at the time, which Lippi sums up as a universal “osanna” (Lippi quoted in Iannuzzi, 2014a:59), and by accolades such as “storica” [memorable], “mitica” [legendary], “celebre” [famed]⁶⁰ in the following decades, but also by its inclusion in textbooks used in state schools (Paura, 2013), which confirms its recognition within official institutions.

Furthermore, commercial success is demonstrated by the several editions and reprints of the first anthology, which is still in print nowadays⁶¹. In addition, three other collections of science fiction published by Einaudi followed - in 1961 (*Il secondo libro della fantascienza*, edited by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini), in 1983 (*Il terzo libro della fantascienza. Il giardino del tempo e altri racconti*, edited by Sergio Solmi) and in 1991 (*Il quarto libro della fantascienza*, edited by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini). However, whilst successful, they did not acquire the cult status of the first volume.⁶²

While Einaudi’s and Solmi’s position within the Italian cultural establishment was certainly fundamental in granting the anthology the necessary ‘cultural capital’ to draw the attention of learned readers, other factors must be taken into account to explain its extraordinary success. I would like to argue that the reasons for its widespread appreciation are to be sought in the particular historical and social climate of the time, to which the anthology seemed to respond. In addition, I posit

⁶⁰ The term “storica” is used in the online presentation of the book on the publisher’s website (<http://www.einaudi.it/libri/libro/aa.vv./le-meraviglie-del-possibile-antologia-della-fantascienza/978880622263>) and by Vittorio Catani in an article about Sergio Solmi at: <http://www.fantascienza.com/magazine/servizi/15971/le-meraviglie-della-fantascienza-secondo-sergio-solmi>. Treanni defines the anthology “mitica” and “celebre” in an article about Fruttero & Lucentini at: <https://www.fantascienza.com/16090/il-peccato-originale-di-fruttero-and-lucentini>.

⁶¹ The latest paperback edition was published in April 2014.

⁶² Italian science fiction writer and critic Vittorio Catani, for example, praises the second anthology edited by Fruttero and Lucentini but he also suggests that the collection lacked the coherence of the first one, mainly because of the introduction of a story by Jorge Luis Borges, “La biblioteca di Babele”, which, he suggests, is not consistent with the rest of the material (Catani, 2012).

that this collection created a model for a re-conceptualisation of science fiction in literary and social terms, preparing the ground for a new way to represent and produce the genre that would especially influence the book-series and magazines of the 1970s.

In the following sections, I will illustrate the general features of the anthology and show how the paratexts played a fundamental role in proposing an alternative model of science fiction that implicitly challenged the representation of the genre in the 1950s popular book-series, and their representation of SF as entertainment. I will also analyse the Italian translations of specific lexical elements and segments that can be seen as representative of issues that were at the heart of public concerns at the time - such as the danger of technological and scientific progress and the influence of American culture and values on Italian society. In particular, I identified the categories of neologisms and culture-bound terms as a way of exploring the images of the future and of American society resulting from the translational actions of the mediators. However, before moving to these elements it is useful to remind ourselves of what anthologies are and of their function within a specific cultural context.

Notwithstanding its widespread appreciation, very little has been said about *Le meraviglie del possibile* in terms of the editors' policies, their criteria in selecting the stories, the presence of specific aesthetic and ideological elements, or how the stories were translated. This neglect highlights the 'invisibility' of anthologies in general as objects of research, and particularly of translation anthologies in spite of their importance, not only as intercultural gates, but as highly manipulated items where operations of culture planning take place (Seruya et al, 2013).

This critical silence is perhaps not surprising, for anthologies may be perceived as mere "containers" of other texts. The word itself, of Greek origin, is associated with the "selection and re-arrangement of small literary texts" (Seruya et al, 2013:3), but choosing and re-arranging texts are far from being simple operations. As Seruya et al. state, drawing on the work of Armin P. Frank (1998) and Patricia Odber de Baubeta (2007), anthologising involves the

deliberate selection of (especially) literary texts or extracts from longer works, based on quality or representativeness of a wider corpus, and **deliberate recontextualization** in a “configured corpus”, which creates a new global meaning different from the mere sum of the meanings of its parts. (Seruya et al., 2013: 4, bold in the original text)

This description highlights the nature of anthologies as ‘cultural constructs’, works based on criteria that are not always clear to identify as notions of “quality” and “representativeness”, are not self-evident categories, but are embedded in specific social and historical contexts and linked to subjective as well as institutional elements. Also, the “new global meaning” evoked by Seruya implies that the cultural significance of an anthology may go beyond the initial intentions of its compilers.

As I will show, this seems to have been the case of *Le meraviglie del possibile* which, apparently born of a desire to show the literary potential of a ‘popular’ genre, came to embody the anxieties of the time in post-war Italy. In so doing, it represents an example of how “anthologies are located at a point of intersection of literary history, poetics, and sociology” (Kittel, quoting Hollerer, 1995:x).

3.2 *Le meraviglie del possibile*: general features

Le meraviglie del possibile represented a novelty in many ways, providing a new formal vehicle to publish science fiction. Anthologies had not traditionally played this role in Italy before the 1960s and *Le meraviglie del possibile* was the first of its kind (Cozzi, 2006:291). This may be surprising to a certain extent, since in the US, where most SF published in Italy originated, SF anthologies had circulated since the 1940s (Nicholls and Langford, 2017) and had been a way of publishing science fiction in book form at a time when SF was still mainly appearing in magazines (Brier, 2010:58). Sergio Solmi himself had come into contact with science fiction for the first time through science fiction anthologies⁶³ in English, and it is possible that the idea of making one gained momentum from this early experience.

⁶³ In Cozzi’s interview with Sergio Solmi, the interviewer suggests that the anthologies read by Solmi could have been the famous collections edited by Groff Conklin (Cozzi, 2006:295), the first of which

In Italy, as I showed in the previous chapter, it was the novels that dominated the market while short stories were confined to the ephemeral life of magazines and, therefore, given little exposure. On the other hand, short stories were at the core of the development of science fiction and in the 1950s still represented not only the main vehicle for the genre but some - especially those in magazines such as *Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* - were at the forefront of innovation⁶⁴. It must not be forgotten that initially SF books often consisted of a “series of several linked short stories” (James, 1995:63), only superficially revised by the author to provide a minimum of coherence needed for the novel form. So, the anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile* had the merit, among other things, to give prominence to the genre of the short story in Italy (Iannuzzi, 2014a:59). At the same time, it paved the way for the publication of other SF anthologies, by showing how the “anthology” could be a suitable channel, and a model format, for publishing science fiction.

There is scant and confusing information about the genealogy of *LMDP* (Iannuzzi, 2014a:59). The most reliable source on this matter seems to be Sergio Solmi himself who, interviewed by Luigi Cozzi, explained how the anthology was originally an idea of Giorgio Monicelli, who wanted to make “un libro serio, importante, da mettere in qualche collana letteraria di prestigio” [a serious, important book to put within a prestigious literary series] and publish it with Mondadori (Solmi in Cozzi, 2006:296). However, for reasons that remain unclear the project fell through and Monicelli abandoned it, perhaps because of his increasingly problematic relationship with Mondadori (Iannuzzi, 2014a:59), or simply because Mondadori did not believe that a ‘literary’ anthology of science fiction would have commercial traction; after all, the magazine *Urania*, which had published the kind of sophisticated material that would appear in the anthology, had to cease publication because of low sales. Solmi, who had connections with

was *The Best of Science Fiction* published in 1946 by Crown Publishers. (Edwards and Clute, 2018).

⁶⁴ Not only anthologies of short stories continued to play an important role as a way of showcasing the best science fiction in the following decades, but they also were instrumental in launching new movements. This was the case of *Dangerous Visions* (1967), the manifesto of the so-called *New Wave* movement, edited by Harlan Ellison, and of *Mirrorshades* (1986), the manifesto of cyberpunk, edited by Bruce Sterling.

Einaudi, took the project there. There, according to Carlo Fruttero (Ventavoli, 2011), it was discussed during one of the weekly “sedute del mercoledì” - meetings held every Wednesday between the publisher and the group of intellectuals who were part of the editorial board, during which decisions were made about the works to be published (Turi, 1997:420). According to Solmi, Monicelli and himself had already selected a good number of stories that were retained, even though he had abandoned the project (Cozzi, 2006: 296). The remaining stories were selected by Carlo Fruttero, as requested by Einaudi himself, with the help of Franco Lucentini (Ventavoli, 2011). Fruttero would also be responsible for the translation of a good number of stories and figure with Solmi as one of the editors.

In the end, the anthology consisted of twenty-nine short stories of various length, from the extremely short (about 320 words) *Sentry* (1954) by Fredric Brown, to the novella-length *Flowers for Algernon* (1959) by Daniel Keyes. The most represented authors were Ray Bradbury with three stories, and Fredric Brown with four stories. Robert Sheckley, Richard Matheson, William Tenn and Isaac Asimov were represented with two stories each (See Appendix I for the complete list).

The anthology collected almost exclusively texts translated from English, although, unbeknown to most readers, one story was in fact a pseudotranslation, i.e. a text without a corresponding source text (Tourey, 1995:40), written by Carlo Fruttero under the pen name of Charles F. Obstbaum (“Fruttero” in German, combining the words “Obst” meaning “fruit”, and “Baum” meaning “tree”). It is not clear why a ‘fictitious translation’ was included in the anthology. From a theoretical point of view, pseudotranslations may be seen as “a way of importing texts not otherwise acceptable as ‘original’ writing into a literary system.” (O’Sullivan, 2011:123) and, as I indicated in Chapter II, it was a system widely adopted by Italian writers of science fiction whose writing might not otherwise have been accepted. This may also be the case for Fruttero’s pseudotranslation, especially because the anthology was specifically presented as an Anglo-American product - its foreign origin clear as the original titles of the stories and the names of the translators were indicated in the internal pages. Still, this does not explain why Fruttero should wish to insert his own work, or why other pseudotranslations were inserted in subsequent

anthologies.⁶⁵ In fact, the “authenticity” of the pseudotranslation was strengthened in subsequent editions of *LMDP*, with the inclusion of a ‘fictitious’ bio-sketch of the imaginary author Charles F. Obstbaum in the 1992 edition. While it may be conceivable that this was an insider joke, simply aimed at entertaining those in the know, the theme of the pseudotranslation and its position in the anthology indicate that it was more than mere entertainment, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

Since most stories had been published in the 1950s, their selection was clearly not based on a chronological criterion. According to Spagnoletti

Delle due possibilità, che avevano i compilatori (Fruttero e Solmi) di presentarci la materia, facendo ruotare l’interesse intorno allo sviluppo storico del genere, oppure limitandosi ad offrire il meglio di questa letteratura, essi hanno scelto la seconda⁶⁶. (Spagnoletti, 1998:127-8)

On the other hand, to establish what the “best” science fiction was - a problematic category in itself – did not prove an easy task, at a time when science fiction criticism had not yet developed and institutions such as science fiction awards had only just started.⁶⁷ In the Preface, Sergio Solmi provides some explanation of what guided the editors’ choice; it is clear that they excluded the purely adventurous stories, as he speaks of a hierarchy between a “primo stadio” [first phase] science fiction, based on a reproduction of the “schemi polizieschi o d’avventura” [adventure or detective frameworks], and a “secondo grado” [second level] science fiction, which goes beyond this earlier stage (Solmi, 1992:xxiii).

Within the repertoire of this second tier, Solmi explains that inclusions were made taking into account variety and balance among the parts but, at the same time, he admits that exclusions and subjective choices had to be made, based on “umore”

⁶⁵ A pseudotranslation was also present in the second collection published by Einaudi, *Le meraviglie del possibile, Il secondo libro della fantascienza*, published in 1961, edited by Franco Lucentini and Carlo Fruttero. In this book it was Franco Lucentini who penned a fictitious translation, “Domenica alla frontiera”, under the pseudonym of Sidney Ward.

⁶⁶ [Of the two choices that the compilers (Fruttero and Solmi) faced when presenting the material, they could either focus on the historical development of the genre or they could limit themselves to providing the best of this literature; they chose the latter.]

⁶⁷ The main US science fiction award, the Hugo Awards, was established in 1953 in the US and held annually since 1955 (See the *The Hugo Awards* website at: <http://www.thehugoawards.org>).

[mood] and “chance” [caso] (Solmi, 1992:xxiii). As a matter of fact, Solmi does not provide many details about the criteria used to choose the stories, mentioning features such as “effetti di sorpresa e di humor” [surprise effects and humour] (*Ibid.*) as well as “un realismo paradossale, in quanto applicato a realtà e situazioni radicalmente immaginarie” [a paradoxical realism, as it is applied to situations that are totally imaginary] (Solmi, 1992: xxiii-xxiv). Looking at what was actually chosen, it is clear that stories focusing on the themes of the encounter with otherness, either in the shape of an alien world or alien creatures, were favoured. Equally numerous are stories dealing with the image of future societies, usually showing dystopic futures extrapolated on the basis of current trends in the West, such as consumerism, overpopulation and the nuclear threat.

It is interesting to note that Solmi and Fruttero had great foresight in their choices, since most of the stories would be singled out in other and later projects: they were often included in subsequent anthologies of best science fiction, or chosen to be adapted for the screen⁶⁸. In addition, two stories would receive the Hugo Award for best short-story, *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes in 1960 and *The Nine Billion Names of God* by Arthur C. Clarke in 2004, awarded retrospectively for this short story published in 1954. Other stories had appeared in different American science fiction anthologies, such as *Arena* by Fredric Brown - included in *The Big Book of Science Fiction* edited by Groff Conklin in 1950. Further evidence of the compilers’ insight lay in the fact that some of their selections are listed among the most reprinted SF stories of all times⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ For example, “Arena” (1944) by Frederic Brown inspired an episode of the TV series *Star Trek*, “The Veldt” (1950) by Ray Bradbury provided the subject for the TV series *Twilight Zone* and Robert Sheckley’s “Seventh Victim” (1953) was adapted for the screen by Elio Petri as *La decima vittima* (1965).

⁶⁹ The list of the 10 most reprinted stories of SF can be seen in *the Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections. Combined Edition* by William G. Contento, last updated in March 2015 and available at: <http://www.philsp.com/homeville/isfac/0start.htm>

3.3 Making science fiction culturally acceptable: paratextual strategies

In this section I will look at the way in which paratextual features played a key role in turning an often “ridiculed” popular form into a cultural object worthy of attention. In her study of “paraliterature”, Laura Ricci argues that the anthology was “un’operazione di ripulitura culturale” (2013:103). This act of “cultural cleansing” started from the first element that potential readers would see, the book cover.

The anthology was published as a hardback, an unusual format for publishing popular literature. Generally speaking, in this period the material properties of books and their price still indicated their belonging to the “higher” or “lower” field of culture, a separation that started in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century in Italy (Ragone, 1997:452). On the other hand, in the US and Britain the hardback format for science fiction had known a moderate degree of success since the 1940s, with the creation of small specialty presses such as the famous Arkham House that published the work of H.P. Lovecraft, to the general and trade publishers who started to issue science fiction hardbacks in the 1950s, when sales of science fiction saw a sudden increase (Weinberg, 2013:123-5).

In fact, the visual strategies adopted for the cover/dustjacket did not follow the conventional science fiction imagery which was still prevalent in science fiction publishing in Italy and elsewhere (see Chapter IV for a more detailed description), but fell in with Einaudi’s policy in terms of book-cover art. Einaudi is well known for the attention he always paid to the visual aspects of the books he published, with innovative ideas for the presentations of his series. He was the first publisher to use reproductions of contemporary art on the book covers, as in the famous “Coralli” series that paired images of artists such as Van Gogh and Picasso with Italian contemporary novelists (Ferrero, 1996). The Einaudi books’ visual image is associated with a white background, seen as an example of sophisticated sobriety and elegance (Ferretti, 2004:36).

The cover image of *Le meraviglie del possibile* was designed by Bruno Munari⁷⁰, one of the graphic artists working for Einaudi (*Ibid.*). The cover, typically white, is divided into two parts of unequal size. The smaller top part has the title and subtitle of the anthology, while the rest of the front cover depicts an abstract design consisting of lines of small yellow, blue and red squares slightly superimposed, against a white background. Other small black squares overlap the coloured ones and create an optical effect of slight movement, suggesting instability⁷¹. With its neat, mostly regular and repetitive lines, this image gives the impression of something produced mechanically, such as the pattern traced by a machine while, at the same time, echoes Mondrian's abstract art.

It is interesting to note that the same abstract cover was maintained for subsequent SF anthologies, the last of which was published in 1991, while the image was changed for the paperback editions (in 1973 and 1992)⁷², using more conventional visual routes. As a matter of fact, looking at the following covers chosen for the paperback editions of the anthology, it seems that as science fiction became increasingly acceptable as a cultural form, the covers increasingly adopted conventional SF imagery. This can be seen in the last edition published in 2014, which reverted to the dramatic and colourful images of earlier science fiction, with a cover where a huge insect hovers over a city⁷³, as was typical of the Bug-Eyed Monster covers of 1930s pulp science fiction.

Another aspect worth mentioning is how the understated cover of the 1959 edition contrasts with the futuristic imagery evoked by the title *Le meraviglie del possibile*. Considering that, as I will discuss in the following sections, the anthology conveys a rather grim portrait of the future, the title sounds highly ironic. In point of fact, the title echoes a proto-science fictional novel published by Emilio Salgari in 1907

⁷⁰The cover can be seen in the online collection of Bruno Munari's works at: <http://www.collezionebrunomunari.it/index.php> (Last accessed: 01/12/18).

⁷¹ See the cover image at: <https://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/volumi/NILF101206/le-meraviglie-del-possibile-antologia-della-fantascienza/>

⁷² The 1973 edition was in fact a shortened version with only sixteen stories, and "The Crystal Egg" by H.G. Wells was replaced with "Il paese dei ciechi" [The Country of the Blind, 1904] by the same author.

⁷³ See the cover of the 2014 edition on the publisher's website, at: <https://www.einaudi.it/catalogo-libri/narrativa-straniera/narrativa-di-lingua-inglese/le-meraviglie-del-possibile-antologia-della-fantascienza-9788806222635/>

entitled *Le meraviglie del duemila* [The wonders of the year 2000]. This was a dystopic novel (Antonello, 2008:105) that, according to De Turrís, shows how the technological and scientific discoveries of future life are ultimately detrimental for human beings (De Turrís, 2002-03).

As Seruya et al. indicate, paratextual features are particularly important in translated anthologies, since through “titles, subtitles, blurbs, prefaces, notes, commentaries or postfaces” a projected image of another culture is presented, as well as its interpretation and evaluation (Seruya et al, 2013:4). In *LMDP*, the act of visual distancing from popular science fiction, symbolised by the cover, is mirrored in the blurbs where a clear distinction is made between the content of the anthology and the rest of published science fiction. The simultaneously informative and evaluative discourse typical of book blurbs here informs the readers that the stories contained in the collection are “vera fantascienza” [real science fiction], in contrast to the “opere mediocri” [mediocre works] of most current productions. The use of the adjective “vera”, instead of something like “migliore” [best], is interesting as it implies an ontological difference between the stories in the anthology and the rest of science fiction. In addition, ‘real’ science fiction is seen as having a clear connection with the Anglo-American literary tradition, since in the blurb some of the authors featured in the anthology are compared with canonical writers

In un Richard Matheson si ritrova l’aspra e drammatica tensione dei più bei racconti americani (...) e le forme di organizzazione sociale che si intravedono nelle gelide satire di Asimov e Sheckley hanno l’inquietante verosimiglianza delle utopie di Huxley e Orwell⁷⁴ (inside cover, *LMDP*).

3.4 The order of the stories and the creation of a new global meaning

In an anthology, the selection of the stories is an important factor in providing the text with a specific identity, but equally crucial is the sequence of the stories it contains. Since in an anthology the whole is greater than the sum of the single parts, it is important to consider how the stories have been arranged, as new

⁷⁴ [in Richard Matheson one finds the hard and dramatic tension of the best American short stories (...) and the forms of social organisations that can be glimpsed in Asimov’s and Sheckley’s sharp satires have the disturbing verisimilitude of Huxley’s and Orwell’s utopias.]

relations are established between the texts and new meanings are built. In this section I will show how the stories in *LMDP* can be seen as forming a sort of overarching text that functions as a commentary on the kind of future world represented in the anthology. In particular, I argue that the anthology can be seen as divided into two parts: in the first part, a number of stories represent human beings from a dislocated perspective, often through the eyes of humans being placed in an alien world, or through the perspective of alien beings that relativize human experience; in the second part, it is the social system itself that is under scrutiny, with a significant number of stories depicting futures based on the extrapolation of already existing elements, such as extreme consumerism and de-humanising technology.

The anthology starts with “L’uovo di cristallo”⁷⁵ (The Crystal Egg, 1897), a story by H.G. Wells and a choice that is not surprising, since Sergio Solmi states in the Preface that Wells is the direct ancestor of science fiction, whose “bitter salt of negativity” connects him with utopian writers such as Jonathan Swift and Samuel Butler (Solmi, 1992:xi, my translation). With these inclusions, the editors provided a sort of “ennobling” framework to the rest of the material, all derived from popular American SF magazines, establishing an ideal connection between the nineteenth century literary utopian tradition and popular science fiction. However, the choice of “L’uovo di cristallo” as starting point is also important in terms of its content. This story seems to provide a symbolic entry into the world of science fiction or, as one of the cover blurbs states, entry into another narrative universe made up of “un ordine diverso, fantastico, eppure coerente e non impossibile” [an order that is different and fantastic, but coherent and not impossible]. This universe in the first story has the shape of Mars and Martians that can be glimpsed by watching through a strange egg-shaped object, appearing in the shop of an antiquarian in London.⁷⁶

In point of fact, after this symbolic threshold, the reader will be taken directly to Mars in the second story, “Villaggio incantato” (Enchanted Village, 1950), by A.E.

⁷⁵ The original titles of the translated stories are given in round brackets, followed by the original year of publication. See also Appendix I (p. 266-68) for a full list of source text titles and corresponding Italian translations.

⁷⁶ The story is believed to have provided an early model for H.G. Wells’ novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

Van Vogt, whose main theme is adaptation and metamorphosis. In this story, an astronaut's struggle to survive in an extremely hostile environment ceases when he suddenly feels perfectly at ease in the place. Told by an omniscient narrator, the story ends with a sort of *dénouement*, revealing that the reason why the astronaut was finally able to live on Mars was due to his transformation into a sort of reptilian creature, adapted to life on Mars. The morale seems to be that to be able to survive it is necessary to adapt, but adaptation involves unexpected changes. Structurally similar is the fourth story, in that it one also ends with a twist, the very short and famous "Sentinella" (Sentry, 1954) by Fredric Brown. A foot soldier of an intergalactic war between Earth and another race describes his fear and loathing for the enemy, termed as "schifosi, ripugnanti mostri" [disgusting, repulsive monsters] (p. 63) that must be exterminated. But only at the very end does the reader realise that these revolting beings are, in fact, human beings, while it is the foot soldier who is an alien. The reversal of perspective of these stories, and the negative view of human beings, is pursued in other tales where the 'alien perspective' is used, to convey the idea of the 'inferiority' of the human race in comparison with other races in the universe. Such is the case, for example, for "Il doppio criminale" (The Party of Two Parts, 1954) by William Tenn, where the first-person narrator, a 'stellar sergeant' in another galaxy, describes planet Earth in rather spiteful terms, highlighting how the technological progress of the inhabitants is not paralleled by a corresponding level of civilization

Abbastanza avanzati tecnologicamente da essere quasi allo Stadio 15 – viaggio interplanetario autonomo – sono ancora secoli indietro dallo Stadio 15A – amichevoli relazioni tra le civiltà galattiche. Si trovano perciò ancora in stato di Sorveglianza Segreta (...) per impedire che quegli imbecilli si facciano saltare in aria da soli prima dell'arrivo del loro millennio spirituale. (Tenn/Bossi, 1992:164)

[Sufficiently advanced technologically to be almost at Stage 15— autonomous inter-planetary travel—they are still centuries away from Stage 15A—friendly relationships between galactic civilizations. They are, therefore, still in a state of Secret Supervision, (...) to prevent those idiots from blowing themselves up before the arrival of their spiritual millennium]

The inferior status of the Earth in relation to other civilisations in the universe is also hinted at in "L'ultimo dei marziani" (The Last Martian, 1950) by Fredric Brown,

where a Martian, part of an army of technically superior Invaders who have taken over the Earth, is described as someone of low intelligence, with an IQ that is the same as the Earth inhabitants.

Happy endings are generally few and often ambiguous. In “Pioggia senza fine” (The Long Rain, 1950) by Ray Bradbury, the only survivor of an expedition on Venus seems at last to find shelter in one of the “Cupole del Sole” [Sun Domes]⁷⁷ specifically built to protect humans from the endless rain. But it is more likely that, as his companions, he has been made insane by the rain, and that the shelter is, in fact, a hallucination. Similarly, in “Miraggio” (Mirage, 1956) by Clifford Simak an explorer finds the seventh member of a group of Martians, which allows him to enter a legendary Martian city. In fact, the explorer enters the city because he dies, implying that a higher spiritual dimension may only be reached in this way.

The stories in the first part of the anthology are quite diverse in terms of plot and tone, as we go from dramatic survival stories such as “Villaggio incantato” and “Pioggia senza fine”, to humorous “first contact” stories, such as “Prott” (Prott, 1953) by Margaret St Clair and “Le immagini non mentono” (Pictures don’t lie, 1951) by Katherine McLean, both dealing with the encounter between human beings and alien races. These two stories are characterised by ironic endings, given that the initial expectation and excitement of the ‘pioneers’ are replaced by bitter disappointment. In the case of “Prott”, the mysterious aliens floating in space and looking like ghosts reveal themselves as incredibly boring creatures who eventually take over the Earth. In “Le immagini non mentono”, the aliens arriving on Earth after scientists have established contact and verified their similarity to humans are so small that, once landed, scientists despair of ever finding them.

The failure of individual human beings is extended to the whole social system in the second part of the anthology that, as Spagnoletti has noted, focuses on stories with a more pronounced sociological or human element (Spagnoletti, 1998:129). Most deal with dystopic portraits of the future, focusing not so much on outer space or first contact with alien races, but rather on how society is organised in the future,

⁷⁷ “Sun Domes” is also the term used in the original text, see Bradbury, 2008:97.

on the role of technology in it and on how human relations change. It is not surprising that a good number of stories in this second section are from the recognised masters of “sociological science fiction”, writers such as Robert Sheckley and Ray Bradbury whose social satires, characterised by sharp writing and corrosive wit, depict a future that indeed appears as a dire time.

The tone-switch starts with the fourteenth story, “Servocittà” (Dumb Waiter, 1952) by Walter Miller Jr., set in a city in post-apocalyptic America, where a supercomputer called Central continues to wage war against human beings even though the city is deserted and the bombers the computer controls are without ammunition. In the city itself, automated policemen and moving sidewalks continue to work as if nothing happened and the city still had human inhabitants. They are what remains of a very advanced technological society that had left everything under the control of the machines, until the latter took over and tried to eliminate the humans. Now survivors, who took shelter in the countryside around the city, want to destroy all the machines. In this scenario arrives Mitch Laskell, a former aircraft computer technician, who thinks that Central can be stopped and returned under human control in order to avoid the loss of knowledge that had taken centuries to build

L'umanità ci aveva messo centomila anni a realizzare una civiltà tecnologica. Se avesse distrutto completamente quella attuale, forse non avrebbe più potuto costruirne un'altra (Miller/Tofano, 1992:252)

[Humanity had taken a hundred thousand years to build a technological civilization. If it wrecked the current one completely, perhaps it would not have been able to build another]

After entering the city and managing to extricate himself from some difficult and sometimes even humorous encounters with the automated authorities, who try to apply the law, Laskell does manage to stop Central and defy his human antagonists, offering them the choice to stay and help or leave the city. In spite of this kind of “happy ending”, the story is full of problematic questions, such as whether it is worth going back to an advanced technological society knowing its risks. This fundamental question is at the core of the story and was clearly a

concern of the writer, as Walter Miller further explored this theme in his most famous novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), where the answer is definitely negative.⁷⁸

Misuse of technology, amoral scientists and social laws based on pragmatism rather than ethical and human values produce the distortions on which the subsequent stories are based. In “Il costo della vita” (The Cost of Living, 1952) by Robert Sheckley, consumerism dominates life to the extent that people are forced to buy things that they are unable to afford and children inherit their parents’ debts. In another story by Sheckley, “La settima vittima” (Seventh Victim, 1953), wars have been eliminated but individuals’ natural aggressive disposition does not have an escape valve any longer so lethal games with willing killers and victims are organised. In Richard Matheson’s “L’esame” (The test, 1954), an old man is forced to undergo a psycho-physical test to prove that he is still sound in mind and body, and failure to pass will cause his elimination. The most vulnerable members of society are also the focus of “Fiori per Algernon” (Flowers for Algernon, 1959), by Daniel Keyes, where a mentally disabled man is injected with drugs that greatly increase his intelligence in the course of a scientific experiment. However, the artificially gained cognitive skills don’t last and the protagonist, Charlie Gordon, reverts to his former condition of mental disability, but now fully aware of what is happening and of how mentally disabled people are treated in society.

Technology is pervasive and people rely so much on it that technological devices replace human relations: in “Consolazione garantita” (Satisfaction Guaranteed, 1951), by Isaac Asimov, a neglected and betrayed wife falls in love with her perfect domestic robot, all part of an experiment to find out which features should be included in the robot itself. The consequences of an excess of technology is also the theme of “Il veldt” (The Veldt, 1950) by Ray Bradbury. In this story, a couple live in their super-technological house, which takes care of the needs of the family in a sort of motherly way

⁷⁸ In *A Canticle for Leibowitz* a group of monks of the Order of Leibowitz, who survived nuclear destruction, manages to rescue books and other remnants of human civilization on the ground that learning must be preserved. Human civilization and its technology will develop once more, until one day the bombs start falling again.

Attraversarono l'ampia entrata della loro Casa Vitabella, a prova di rumore, che avevano pagata trentamila dollari pronta per l'uso, questa casa che li vestiva e nutriva e cullava nel sonno, che suonava e cantava per loro, questa casa amica. (Bradbury/Fruttero, 1992:465)

[They walked through the wide hall of their Beautiful Life Home, soundproofed, which they had paid thirty thousand dollars ready to use, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them in their sleep, which played and sang for them, this friendly house]

The house includes a virtual reality nursery, telepathically connected with their two children and able to recreate all that goes on in their mind. When the parents realise that the children are addicted to the nursery, they try to switch it off but the children, realising their intent, trick them into the nursery and have them killed by the lions of their simulated African landscape, which the strength of the children's imagination had made real.

The anthology concludes with three stories all depicting the end of the world, which happens in different ways, all involving technology. In "I nove miliardi di nomi di Dio" (The Nine Billion Names of God, 1952), by Arthur C. Clarke, computer engineers are called by Tibetan monks to use their supercomputer and find all the possible names of God, thus fulfilling a prophecy that says the world will end once all the names of Gods are found as there will be no reason for the world to exist any longer. Not believing in the prophecy, and thinking the monks will get angry once they see that nothing happens, the engineers leave the monastery just before the computer finds the last few names, and looking up at the sky they see the stars go black.⁷⁹ After Clarke's story comes Carlo Fruttero's pseudotranslation "L'affare Herzog", whose fictitious source text is given as "The Historical Case of Lieutenant Herzog". The story tells of how human beings rejected technology and tried to go back to the "antichi valori" [old values] (p. 531), after what they believed was the apocalypse. Each country then tried to return to "l'epoca più felice e nobile del loro passato" [the happiest and most noble time of their past] (Obstbaum/Fruttero, p. 231). However, when in France something happens that appears as the repetition of the well-known "Dreyfuss Affair", people realise that the apocalypse

⁷⁹ In the shortened 1973 edition of the anthology, this is the last story.

did take place and that “life” consists in the endless repetition of the past, going up and down the stairs of history, (p. 534), as the narrator says

Siamo rimasti in vita solo per rivivere esistenze già vissute, dar luogo a eventi già accaduti, salire e scendere con risibile libertà la scala mozza della nostra storia. (Obstbaum, 1992:534)

[We have survived only to live a life that we have already lived, give rise to events that have already happened, go up and down the truncated stairs of our history with laughable freedom]

In this way, the idea of “future” itself becomes meaningless, and so do all attempts to stop history or change its course.

From the ironical reflection of “L'affare Herzog”, with its Vichian overtones, the anthology moves on to the last story, “Ora Zero” (Zero Hour, 1947) again by Ray Bradbury, one of Sergio Solmi's favourite authors. Starting with the reassuring description of children playing under the distracted supervision of their parents, the story shows how a young girl, Mink, and her friends are involved in a game called Invasion which will turn out to be a ploy devised by an alien creature to conquer the planet and exterminate human beings. However, behind the flimsy cover of an extra-terrestrial invasion, this is a sharp satire of contemporary America, albeit dislocated in a future as glossy and perfect as a futuristic postcard, where life has been made easy by advanced technological devices, war has been defeated by some kind of global alliance and everybody is happy

Ovunque regnava quella presunzione serena, quella facilità di un mondo abituato alla pace, sicuro che non ci sarebbero mai più stati guai. Mano nella mano, gli uomini formavano un fronte unito per tutta la Terra. Tutte le nazioni condividevano con perfetta equità le armi perfette. Una situazione di mirabile equilibrio era stata raggiunta. Non c'erano traditori tra gli uomini, non c'erano infelici, non c'erano scontenti; il mondo viveva su solide e stabili basi. (Bradbury/Fruttero, 1992:537)

[Everywhere there reigned that serene presumption, that easiness of a world accustomed to peace, certain there would never be trouble again. Hand in hand, men were a united front all over earth. All nations shared the perfect weapons in perfect equity. A situation of wonderful balance had been reached. There were no traitors among men, there were no unhappy ones, there were no disgruntled ones; the world lived on solid and stable ground]

The ironic tone of this fairytalish image is unmistakable, and equally delusional is the idea that human beings have reached a permanent state of security. The enemy penetrates through the weakest and apparently harmless link, the children themselves, represented, as in many Bradbury's stories, as the enemy within. It is interesting that all three stories at the end of the anthology deal, in different ways, with apocalyptic visions as all end with references to the end of the world. This is perhaps not surprising since, as Mussgnug points out, "Expectations of a dystopian or apocalyptic future are central to twentieth and twenty-first century culture, and constitute a pervasive influence on popular culture" (Mussgnug, 2012:333). However, even taking this aspect into consideration, the position of these stories right at the end of the collection seems to have a particular cautionary value. Especially the last story, with its portrait of a perfect technological future that is about to be destroyed by alien forces, with the assistance of the human children, seems to be an admonition about the destructive potential of the next generation. It is then understandable that Spagnoletti, commenting on the stories in the second half of the anthology, sees in them a sense of "pietà per l'uomo d'oggi" [pity for today's humanity] (Spagnoletti, 1998:129).

3.5 The translations of the short stories in *Le meraviglie del possibile*

While the analysis of the paratexts and the structure of the anthology offered a key to understanding its underlying meaning, analysing the translations provides another form of support for my interpretation. As I indicated in the Introduction, a descriptive approach was adopted, whereby I conducted a preliminary textual comparison between the source texts and the target texts and I identified specific segments to be analysed (Toury, 1995). The criterion I used for the selection of the segments was based on the idea that the translation of words referring to science and technology could offer insights into the kind of future the mediators wanted to represent. In the texts I found many words of this kind, but for the purposes of the present discussion I limited my analysis to three fields: space travel, cars and domestic appliances, and computers. In addition, I looked at how the representation of "otherness" was translated, as it would offer interesting insights in relation to the definition of "humanity". After outlining some general themes and

topics through the analysis of paratexts and the order of the textual material, in this and the following sections I will examine a selection of translated words and expressions from the short stories, with the aim of ascertaining to what extent the features previously highlighted are reflected in the translations themselves.⁸⁰

Since the textual comparisons were also useful to review the general translation approach adopted by translators, before proceeding to the analysis of the selected terms I will also briefly discuss some general stylistic traits that I identified in the translations. The first element of note is how, from a stylistic point of view, many translations in *LMDP* tend to be characterised by a more pronounced literary style and higher register, compared with the source texts, resulting in an overall impression of elegance.

A few selected examples⁸¹ will illustrate how lexical items, phrases and even syntactical structures were rendered in ways that sounded more literary and elegant:

Example 1 – Words and expressions with a heightened register

1a) ST - His **fury** faded with each mile that he walked, and his black grief for his friends became a **gray** ache (Enchanted Village)

TT - Ma il suo **furore** si placava a misura che le miglia si aggiungevano alle miglia, e la cupa disperazione per gli amici morti finì per diventare una **plumbea** tristezza.

[But his **fury** appeased as miles added to miles, and his dark desperation for his dead friends ended up being a **laden** sadness] (Villaggio incantato, p. 25)

1b) ST - People have been listening to it for a long time, and researching, trying to work out why **stellar radiation on those bands comes in such jagged bursts** (Pictures Don't Lie)

⁸⁰ The linguistic segments and other items from the source texts mentioned in this part of the thesis originate from online versions of the source texts and do not always have page numbers. A list of the websites where these texts are stored is available in the reference section.

⁸¹ All the examples of translations and page references quoted in this chapter have been taken from the 1992 edition of *Le meraviglie del possibile*.

TT - Da un pezzo si facevano ricerche in questo campo per scoprire il perché di queste **intermittenze**.

[Research in this field has been conducted for a long time to find out the reasons of these **intermittences**.] (Le Immagini non mentono, p. 206)

1c) ST - But just **under my euphoria**, just at the edge of consciousness, I am aware of an intense loneliness. (Prott)

TT - Ma **sotto il velo di questa euforia** sono cosciente di una profonda solitudine

[But **under the veil of this euphoria** I am aware of a deep loneliness] (Prott, p. 68)

In 1a) “fury” and “gray” are rendered with “furore” and “plumbea” whose register is higher than the more obvious choices “furia” and “grigia”; the adjective “plumbea” is especially typical of a literary register. The sentence “with each mile that he walked” is turned into an impersonal structure in Italian and is made more emphatic, thanks to the repetition of “miglia”.

In 1b) and 1c) the higher register and elegance results not only from lexical choices but also from an overall reworking of the syntactic structure, aimed at condensing the meaning and making the style more fluent. In 1b) the English passage has been summarised in the Italian translation - both in relation to its general content and its ‘technical’ elements. The Italian version is not only shorter but more formal, the active voice has been changed into a passive one, the mixture of technical elements “stellar radiation on those bands” and metaphorical language, “jugged bursts”, has been condensed into one single word “intermittenze”. The Italian loses the liveliness and personal engagement expressed in the original and gains a more authoritative and detached tone, as well as a more elegant form. Also, in the second example, the phrase “under my euphoria” is rendered with a more elegant image, “sotto il velo di questa euforia”, and the sentence is also syntactically more fluent thanks to the omission of the phrase “just at the edge of consciousness”, which was probably perceived as redundant.

The tendency to use a higher register also affects dialogues which often lose the colloquial style and the idiomatic expressions of the originals, as in the following examples (2 and 3):

Example 2 (From “Feeling of power”/“Nove volte sette”)

ST - It involves some **tricky points** and we haven't **licked the bugs** yet.

TT - La cosa comporta naturalmente alcuni **passaggi difficilissimi** e ancora **non disponiamo di tutti gli elementi**

[The thing naturally requires some very difficult passages and we don't have all the elements yet.] (“Nove volte sette”, p. 290)

Example 3 – (From “A man of distinction”/ “Un uomo esemplare”)

ST - Lissen, **Massah**, Ah ain't **gwine** no place 'tall 'thout you-all buy me a drink.

TT - Per me è tutto lo stesso, **purché prima mi offriate** da bere

[For me it's all the same, provided you buy me a drink first] (“Un uomo esemplare”, p. 228)

In example 2, the idiomatic “tricky points” and the somewhat obscure English expression “licked the bugs”, presumably meaning “resolving problems”, are turned into the more standardised and general Italian “passaggi difficilissimi” and “non disponiamo di tutti gli elementi”. These differences possibly highlight different expectations in relation to the scientific discourse, even the fictional one: in Italian, the idiomatic and informal style adopted by the American scientists would probably not be acceptable and perceived as unsuitable to their professional persona.

In the third example, the non-standard speech of the character is again rendered in a much more correct and ‘cleaner’ version. The person uttering the sentence is a drunkard using an expression that is very culture-specific, the word ‘Massah’, i.e. a deformed version of ‘Master’ with racist connotations as it is associated with the speech of African slaves in the US. While, given its cultural specificity, ‘Massah’ could not be rendered into Italian, it is not clear why the sentence has been

rendered with a much more formal register, which even includes a subjunctive “purché prima mi **offriate** da bere”.

There are, however, also cases of translations that not only reproduce informal language, but sometimes even emphasise the “vulgar” elements. For example, in “Steel” (1956), a short story by Richard Matheson, set in the world of boxing in the near future (1974), the characters’ colloquial expressions are intensified through the use of a ‘vulgar’ term, “Merda” [Shit] and a religiously-connoted swearword “Diocristo” not present in the original:

Example 4 – (From “Steel”/ “Acciaio”)

ST - “Aw, shut the hell up!” Kelly snapped suddenly, getting redder.
“You’re always knockin’ ’im down. (“Steel”)

TT – Merda! Piantala – scattò Kelly, paonazzo. – Perché lo devi sempre buttare giù? Diocristo!

[Shit! Stop it – Kelly snapped, with a purple face – Why do you always have to put him down? Jesus Christ!] (“Acciaio”, p. 318)

The language of the source text is characterised by a very colloquial register, signalled by slangy expressions and a number of graphic signs conventionally used to represent a spoken register. The Italian version shows attempts to reproduce these traits, for example the rendering of “shut up” with “piantala” and of “knockin’ ’im down” with “buttare giù”, but in places the translations are rather marked and artificial. For example, in the following sentence the idiomatic expression “to be in the game” is rendered as “essere nella faccenda” but, while the term “faccenda” is an informal term meaning “matter, activity”, the expression “essere nella faccenda” sounds rather marked in Italian and not very clear.

Example 5 – (From “Steel”/ “Acciaio”)

ST – “Yeah,” he said. “Used t’be **in the game** m’self.

TT – Sì, - disse. - Una volta ero nella **faccenda** io stesso.
[Yes – he said. – Once I was in the activity myself] (p. 321).

In conclusion, while there are attempts to reproduce the variety of register and style employed in the originals, the Italian versions always sound slightly more literary. This tendency to raise the stylistic literary quality of the texts may be explained in two ways. Firstly, the mediators were probably applying 'norms' consistent with the system of translated literature in Italy. Venturi, for example observed that most Italian translations of canonical literature are characterised by a higher register (Venturi, 2009). Also, Morini, commenting on Venturi's essay, stated that

the (modern) classic, even when its style is very colloquial or downright vulgar, must be brought up to the accepted standard for literary writing in Italian – which does not admit of low-register, colloquial, or vulgar words. (Morini, 2014:180)

Even if the texts included in the anthology were not strictly speaking part of canonical literature, the editors had selected them precisely because of their 'proximity' with authors belonging to the American canon and the English tradition of utopian writers, specifically Huxley and Orwell: thus, the translators may have simply applied internalised rules. Secondly, the 'use' of this norm may have had a more strategic aspect, as one of the aims of the compilers was to make science fiction acceptable in the eyes of a new sophisticated readership, and one way of achieving this goal was to apply the stylistic conventions associated with 'high' literature, either original or in translation. As I will show later in this chapter, in some cases these stylistic elements evoked images from classical myths and literature, although it is not clear whether these links were deliberate.

3.6 The translation of words related to science and technology

The main aim of this section is to examine lexical items that can be seen as representative of the issues discussed by Solmi in the Preface, namely terms that are especially linked to ideas of technological progress and futuristic scenarios. There are many such terms in the source texts, thus it was necessary to make a selectio, based on those words and expressions that seemed particularly relevant and interesting. The areas that I selected are those referring to space travel, cars and domestic appliances, and computers.

Most of the terms selected for analysis are neologisms, which can be defined as “newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense” (Newmark, 1988:140). While neologisms are created all the time in natural languages, to express new ideas and concepts, in literature they represent a deliberate deviation from the norm and may have other functions. In science fiction, they are particularly important as they can be seen as the one, specific stylistic characteristic of the genre. Westfahl, for example, considers them “a basic, and powerful, element in the style of science fiction” (Westfahl, 1992:223).

- Space travel

The ability to travel through space may be considered a typical “science fiction trope” (Slusser, 2005:742) and, generally speaking, as one of the main signs of technological progress. In the anthology, many stories deal with or refer to space travel, using different terms for the vehicles with which such journeys take place. In the corpus of English source texts, the words used are “spaceship”, “rocketship” or rocket, “starship” and the abbreviated form “ship”. By the time the anthology was published, these terms were well-established in English-language science fiction and had, in some cases, contributed to their entering the language. The term “spaceship” was recorded as early as 1894 (Prucher, 2009:218), followed by “rocketship” in 1927⁸² and “starship” first recorded in 1934 (Prucher, 2009:219).

The terms are not interchangeable, and once the authors chose a particular term, they stuck to it. A “rocket” or “rocketship” is usually a subcategory of space vehicles as it is “a spaceship powered by rockets” (Merriam-Webster online), while “spaceship” and “starship” are more general terms. In addition, they do not necessarily convey the same image since “rocketships” are usually represented as oblong vehicles, while “spaceships” and “starships” may have a number of shapes and designs.

⁸² See the relevant entry about “rocketship” in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rocketship?show=0&t=1422524409>

The Italian versions appear much less consistent in this respect and seem to use different terms, as if they were interchangeable. A few segments from “Enchanted Village” and their translations will illustrate this point:

Examples from “Enchanted Village”/ “Villaggio incantato”

Example 1

ST - He had underestimated the speed at which the **rocketship** had been travelling.

TT- Aveva infatti sottovalutato la velocità a cui il **razzo** volava. (p. 25)

[He had actually underestimated the speed of the **rocket**]

Example 2

ST - There was only Bill Jenner, pilot of the first **rocketship** ever to land on Mars.

TT- C’era soltanto Bill Jenner, pilota del primo **razzo** che mai fosse atterrato su Marte. (p. 31)

[There was only Bill Jenner, the pilot of the first **rocket** ever landed on Mars]

Example 3

ST - It has been intended that the **rocketship** land near one of those shallow, tideless seas.

TT – Era stato per questo che avevano deciso di far atterrare l’**astronave** presso uno di quei mari bassi. (p. 32)

[That is the reason why they had decided to land the **starship** near one of those low seas.]

While in the first two segments the Italian uses the word “razzo”, in another part of the translation the term “astronave” is used.

It is not clear why there was this lack of consistency in relation to the translation of these terms. Perhaps it was due to stylistic reasons, as Italian is less tolerant of repetition, or perhaps to the translator’s lack of scientific knowledge. I have

reported this example to compare it with the remarkable coherence shown in other cases of translation of technical words, showing that there did not seem to be a consistent strategy to deal with words or, maybe, that some kind of strategy was adopted only in relation to certain areas, namely those more representative of daily living. These elements will be illustrated in the following sections.

- Cars and domestic appliances

A number of stories deal with life in the future, with references to futuristic cars, houses and domestic appliances. These are where neologisms are often found. An interesting aspect of these translations is that the Italian renderings are often more opaque than the English equivalent terms, intensifying the futuristic effect and the sense of a world where technology dominates. The most striking examples are the translations of words referring to futuristic cars. They occur in two stories, "Ora Zero" (Zero Hour, 1947) and "Il costo della vita" (Cost of Living, 1952), where the English terms used to depict futuristic cars are "beetle"⁸³ and "jet-lash", respectively. These two different terms are rendered with the same word in Italian, "autogetto", which is a neologism built by way of analogy with "aviogetto" - a more technical synonym of "aereo a reazione" [jetplane]. "Aviogetto" itself is actually used to render the standard English word "jet" in "La settima vittima" (Seventh Victim, 1953). The repetition of the same word across different stories contributes to a sense of coherence and unity in the Italian translations, as if a single futuristic scenario was evoked, rather than the different ones imagined in the source texts.

A substantial number of neologisms occurred in stories that portrayed life in future homes. This was a theme that by the 1950s had been widely developed in the United States, where representations of "the home of tomorrow" had started to spread since the 1920s (Horrigan, 1986:137). The stories that especially depict futuristic domestic spaces are "Il costo della vita" (Cost of Living), "Il Veldt" (The

⁸³ It is not clear whether Ray Bradbury was inspired by the existence of the Volkswagen "beetle" for the creation of the term "beetle car". The German car started to be produced in Germany in the late 1930s but exports began only in the early 1950s, and it became popular in the US only in the late 1950s. Bradbury used the term in other texts, such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and in "Doodad", a short story published in *Astounding Science Fiction*, in September 1943.

Veldt) and “Ora zero” (Zero Hour).⁸⁴ In the Italian translations, a number of neologisms were created through the use of the term “servo” which, according to the Dictionary of Italian Language Devoto-Oli, is used in Italian technical language to form compounds indicating the relationship between two mechanisms. “Servo” is used throughout “Il costo della vita” to translate neologisms that are meant to refer to the domestic appliances of the future. However, while in the English text these expressions have different forms, in Italian the same basic structure of “servo+noun” is repeated, as shown in the examples below:

Examples of neologisms created with the structure “servo+N” in “Cost of Living”/ “Il costo della vita”

	Original term	Translation
1a	Kitchen-butler	Servo cucina
1b	Auto-towel	Servo asciugatore
1c	Wall reminder	Servo memoria a muro
1d	Auto dresser	Servo guardaroba
1e	Service machinery	Servo meccanismi
1f	Automatic bartender	Servo barman
1g	Master operator	Servo governante

While the use of the term “servo” to create neologisms may constitute an ingenious way of solving the problem of translating the English words, the repetition of the same structure throughout the text is slightly oppressive and intensifies the impression of a life dominated by technological gadgets.

In addition, this strategy is used across different narratives, as the word “servo” is employed in “Il Veldt” to translate the expression “picture painter” – an automatic painter for children – rendered as “servopittore”, and also to translate the title in “Dumb Waiter”, that in Italian becomes “Servocittà”. While the consistency in “Il Veldt” and “Ora zero” was probably due to the fact that Carlo Fruttero had translated both stories, “Servocittà” was the work of Gilberto Tofano.

⁸⁴ Also “La casa nuova” (...and he built a crooked house, 1941) can be included in this category, as it deals with an architect trying to build a house with a fifth dimension. The story was written by Robert Heinlein and is perhaps a reference to the “Dimaxion House”, a kind of futuristic house meant to be self-sufficient, designed in the 1920s by architect R. Buckminster Fuller.

The same translators, Gilberto Tofano and Carlo Fruttero, applied the same strategy in relation to another word to be found in different stories: “fonovisore”, a neologism made by joining “fono” [phono], which is part of many Italian compounds, with “visore” [visor]. “Fonovisore” is used to translate “audio-visor” in “Il costo della vita” (tr. by Tofano) and the verb “to televise” in “Il Veldt” (tr. by Fruttero), a word meant to represent futuristic telephones, able to transmit images as well as sounds.

The use of the same terms across different stories seems to indicate an overall editorial intervention aimed at making homogeneous the use of ‘technical’ neologisms in the anthology. However, this strategy also has an interesting ideological effect, since one has the impression that a number of stories are set in the same fictitious universe, depicted from slightly different perspectives.

- Computers

Another word that frequently occurs in the source texts is “computer”. Italy was not as advanced as other Western countries in terms of knowledge and implementation of the new calculators coming mainly from the US, but in the 1950s interest in the new machines grew in Italian society at large and among specialists (cf. Zane, 2000), although it took time for Italian potential users to acquire them. In 1958 there were only forty computers at work in Italy, against two thousand five hundred in the US (Bedetti, 2006), and it is likely that most people, especially non-scientists, did not have very clear ideas about these machines. The most frequently used words in the translations are “calcolatrice” [calculator] and “cervello elettronico” [electronic brain], sometimes even used interchangeably in the same story, as in example 1a and 1b (from “The Nine Billion Names of God”/ “I nove miliardi di nomi di Dio”) where two different words are used to refer to the same thing:

Examples from “The Nine Billion Names of God”/”I nove miliardi di nomi di Dio”

Example 1a

ST - To supply a Tibetan monastery with an Automatic Sequence **Computer**

TT - Fornire a un monastero tibetano un **cervello elettronico** (p. 519)

[To supply a Tibetan monastery with an electronic brain]

Example 1b

ST - Your Mark V **Computer**

TT - La vostra **calcolatrice** Modello V (p. 519)

[Your Model V calculator]

In other cases, the variety is even greater, as in the following list from “Servocittà” (Dumb Waiter, 1952) - a story set in a post-atomic environment where a machine called “Central Computer” controls an automated city. The word “computer” is used in several phrases, but in Italian it is rendered with different expressions (Example 2a and 2b from “Dumb Waiter”/ “Servocittà”)

Example 2a

ST - [he] heard the faint twittering of **computer code**

TT - Sentì i suoni modulati del **codice elettronico**

[He heard the modulated sounds of the electronic code]

Example 2b

ST- a **booking computer** clicked behind its desk

TT - Uno **schedatore** ticchettava dietro una scrivania

[A cataloguer was tapping behind a desk]

In 2a) “computer code” is translated with “codice elettronico” [electronic code], while in 2b) the phrase “booking computer” is translated with “schedatore” [cataloguer], a choice that does not clearly express the fact that the ST refers to an automaton. It is possible that these references were too complicated to be understood by the translators as there are, sometimes, mistakes or omissions. In “Impostore” (Impostor, 1953) a reference to “computer programming” shows remarkable changes in Italian and perhaps it was misunderstood since the translation is not correct (Example 3 from “Impostor”/“Impostore”)

Example 3

ST- he originated **programming patterns** that resulted in self-directing war computers of the highest sort.

TT - a lui facevano capo tutti i laboratori di ricerche incaricati di progettare i **cervelli elettronici** e gli automi impiegati nel conflitto

[He was the head of all the research labs which had the task of designing the computers and the robots employed in the conflict]

One of the most striking omissions comes from “Le immagini non mentono” (Pictured Don’t Lie, 1951), where a long, complicated explanation of how a scientist managed to decode transmissions from an alien race is summarized into one sentence: “Fu un lavoro tremendo” [It was very hard work] (Example 4).

Example 4

ST - I recorded a couple of package screeches from Sagittarius and began working on them," Nathen added. "It took a couple of months to find the synchronizing signals and set the scanners close enough to the right time to even get a pattern. When I showed the pattern to the Department, they gave me full time to work on it, and an assistant to help. It took eight months to pick out the color bands, and assign them the right colors, to get anything intelligible on the screen."

The shabby- looking mess of exposed parts was the original receiver that they had labored over for ten months, adjusting and readjusting to reduce the maddening rippling plaids of un- synchronized color scanners to some kind of sane picture.

"Trial and error," said Nathen, "but it came out all right."

TT - Registrai un paio di messaggi “condensati” dal Sagittario e cominciai a elaborarli, - Nathen riprese. – **Fu un lavoro tremendo** ma alla fine ci riuscimmo.

[I recorded a couple of “condensed” messages from Sagittarius and began to process them – Nathen resumed – It was very hard work but we finally succeeded] (p. 208)

The tendency to simplify long and complex technical references may appear contradictory when compared with other sections, where the “technical flavour” of the text is intensified. This can be explained by the fact that translators and editors were probably more interested in highlighting only those aspects of technology that they thought of as more damaging for human beings, as they could alter social and familial cohesion. In “Il costo della vita” the use of the term “servo” to translate a number of English imaginary gadgets is not just a way of solving a translation problem: its regular repetition evokes the kind of dehumanizing repetitive automation associated with assembly lines. This concept is clearly expressed in “The Veldt”, where the protagonist, who has bought a house full of automatic appliances, is told by a psychologist that he has to stop if he wants to save himself and his family (Example 5 from “The Veldt”/Il Veldt):

Example 5

ST - George, you’ll have to change your life. **Like too many others, you’ve built it around creature comforts.** Why, you’d starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn’t know how to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything off. Start new.

TT - George, tu devi cambiare vita. Anche tu **come tanti, come troppi, ti sei lasciato conquistare dalle comodità, dagli automi.** Se domani si guastasse qualcosa nella tua cucina moriresti di fame. Non sapresti neppure rompere un uovo. **Adesso basta:** devi lasciar perdere tutto e cominciare da capo. (p. 475-76)

[George, you must change your life. You too, like many others, like too many others, have let yourself be conquered by comfort, by the robots. If tomorrow something broke in your kitchen you’d starve to death. You could not even break an egg. That’s enough: you must leave everything and start again]

It is worth noting how in the Italian translation the psychologist’s comment is delivered with more emphasis than in the original text. The imperative “turn

everything off. Start new” is rendered as the much more categorical “Adesso basta: devi lasciar perdere tutto e cominciare da capo” [That’s enough: you must leave everything and start again]. In addition, the English is more ambiguous, as the expression “turning off” could just refer to stopping the computer, while in Italian the psychologist encourages the character to abandon the kind of life that he has led until then.

3.7 The translation of “otherness”

The concept of otherness has emerged in contemporary critical theory to indicate the exclusion of particular individuals and groups from what can be described as “the system of normality”, through which the rules are established of what it means to be “normal”, i.e. “human” (Hawthorn, 1994:141). Being “other” means to a certain extent to be outside humanity and, with its non-human tropes, aliens and robots, science fiction is in a privileged position to discuss issues related to the concept of “otherness”. As Adam Roberts states, “Science fiction is about the encounter with difference” (2000:183) and this “difference” can be explored either through the relationship between humans and machines or encounters with other beings.

In *Le meraviglie del possibile*, several stories deal with the encounter of human beings with alien creatures or machines, so it could be said that the question of what defines “humanity” or “non-humanity” is at the core of the anthology.

- Translating the “otherness” of machines

As I highlighted in the previous section, several stories in *LMDP* contain references to “futuristic technology” and although it could be said that, as Adam Roberts notes, any “piece of SF technology (...) provides a direct, material embodiment of alterity” (2000:147), it is also true that the metaphorical power of these objects varies. For example, in “L’esame” (The test, 1954) by Richard Matheson, the fact that the characters live in a house with some “futuristic” features seems marginal compared to the main issue of the story, i.e. a future society where old people are eliminated when they do not pass a test about their psycho-physical fitness. In this story, the presence of advanced technological gadgets appears to have the function of stage

props signalling the “future”, although they may also be seen as a reflection on the dehumanised pragmatism of a society that kills human beings to resolve the problem of overpopulation.

In other cases, the role of technological elements seems to be that of “fetishised commodities” (Roberts, 2000:150) such as in “Il costo della vita” (The Cost of Living, 1952, Robert Sheckley), and “Il Veldt” (The Veldt, 1950, Ray Bradbury), where people’s lives are so dominated by gadgets that parents are ready to burden their children with life-long debts (in “Il costo della vita”), or children kill their parents in order to continue playing with their favourite toy (in “Il Veldt”). In these stories, however, there is still a clear separation between human beings and machines. One story in which this separation is questioned is “Consolazione garantita” (Satisfaction Guaranteed, 1951) by Isaac Asimov, which deals with the relationship developing between a housewife and her automated domestic help, a handsome humanoid robot⁸⁵ named Tony. Tony was placed in Claire Belmont’s house by her husband to test the machine before starting production. The story records the way in which Claire’s feelings for the robot change, from repulsion and fear to love, as the machine gradually recognises the woman’s unhappiness and helps her to change herself and the house, regaining her self- esteem.

The story clearly owes much to Villiers de l’Isle-Adam famous novel *L’Eve future*⁸⁶ (1886) as Tony, the robot, represents a sort of ‘perfect man’. Not only is he extremely attractive, but he is much more sensitive and kinder than Claire’s own husband, who contributes to his wife’s inferiority complex through his admiration of Gladys Claffern, a rich and self-confident socialite. Although at a surface level the story’s main concern seems to be that of exploring the relationship of a human being with a machine, in a wider sense what is really questioned is what defines ‘humanity’ which, interestingly, is developed in terms of sexual politics. The only character in the story whose humanity is not questioned is Claire’s husband. His

⁸⁵ “Robot”, a term invented by Czech writer Karel Capeck in his novel R.U.R. (1920), is just one of the many words that in the course of time have been coined to define, as Featherstone and Burrows note, an ever-increasing connection between the “human” and the “machine” and record the blurring of the formerly separated categories of the biological, the technological, the natural, the artificial and the human (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995:3).

⁸⁶ In *L’Eve future* [The Future Eve] a fictionalised Thomas Alva Edison creates a perfect woman for a friend, Lord Ewald, whose fiancée is beautiful but imperfect in many other ways.

selfishness and ambition, though negative qualities, are clearly typical of human beings. He is also the one who establishes the extent of 'humanity' of the robot when, at the beginning of the story, he reassures Claire telling her that: "È umano quasi quanto te o me" [He's almost as human as you or I] (p. 297). Interestingly, it's again Tony, a 'man', albeit not entirely human, who defines what a human being should be like, at least the female of the species (Example 1).

Example 1

ST - ...you are what I have been manufactured to see human beings as. **You are kind, friendly, unassuming.** Mrs. Claffern, as you describe her, is not, and I wouldn't obey her as I would you.

TT- **Siete gentile, buona, modesta.** La signora Claffern, a giudicare dalla vostra descrizione, non lo è, ed io non le ubbidirei come obbedisco a voi.

[You are **kind, good, modest.** Mrs Claffern, judging from your description, is not, and I would not obey her as I obey you] (p. 308)

The definitions of womanhood are, however, slightly divergent in the source text and target text and they seem to refer to different cultural expectations about proper female behaviour in Italy and America in the 1950s. Particularly interesting is the replacement of "unassuming" with "modesta", a word that, while partially covering the meaning of the English term, when collocated with "donna" tends to refer to "I canoni tradizionali dell'atteggiamento e del comportamento proprio della donna seria e virtuosa" [the traditional standards of behavior of a serious and virtuous woman] (See entry in: Devoto-Oli, Dizionario della lingua italiana, 1990).

In the same way that Claire's humanity is defined by Tony, also 'non-humanity' is defined in relation to the robot. Gladys' humanity, for example, is questioned not only because Tony says that she is very different from Claire and he would not obey her in the same way, but also because Gladys is described through the 'vocabulary of the factory', through the use of the word "manufactured" in English and "prodotto" [product] in Italian (Example 2).

Example 2

ST - She was the type of woman who seemed made to be seen in glimpses... **Perfectly and precisely manufactured**; dressed with thoughtful hand and eye; too gleaming to be stared at.

TT - Era proprio il tipo di donna che sembrava fatto per essere guardato... **prodotto preciso e perfetto**, vestito con mano e occhio infallibili, troppo smagliante per poterlo fissare.

[She was just the type of woman who seemed made to be looked at...a **perfect and precise product**, dressed in an unerring way, too dazzling to be stared at] (p. 300)

In this case, the target text follows fairly closely the source text, and both highlight how Gladys's 'perfection' evokes the 'artificial shine' of something manufactured, i.e. produced by a machine. Equally faithful is the translation of the description of scientist Susan Calvin, whose humanity seems also to be lacking (Example 3).

Example 3

ST - Dr. Susan Calvin was there, too, sitting stiffly in thin-lipped abstraction. She had the cold, faraway look of someone who has worked with machines so long that a little of the steel had entered the blood.

TT - C'era anche la dottoressa Susan Calvin, rigida e assorta, le labbra strette. Aveva l'espressione fredda, distante, di chi ha lavorato così a lungo con le macchine che un po' del loro acciaio gli è penetrato nel sangue.

[There was also Dr. Susan Calvin, stiff and absorbed, thin-lipped. She had the cold and distant expression of those who have been working with machines for so long that a little of their steel has penetrated their blood] (p. 297)

The close translations of the two extracts above seem to tacitly approve the idea expressed in the ST, that women who do not conform to the dominating representation of female identity are basically non-human.

After discussing how the source text and target text define humanity and non-humanity in relation to the female characters, I will now look at the way in which the 'almost humanity' of the robot is defined in both. As I will show, while in the

source text Tony remains a machine, in the target text the robot is described in terms that are more typical of human beings, through a series of semantic shifts.

One of the first deviations appears at the beginning of the story, when Claire first sees Tony and she refers to him as a “it” in the source text, whereas in Italian she uses the pronoun “Lui” [he] (Example 4).

Example 4

ST – It was there, looking at her

TT – *Lui* era là, che la fissava (Italics in the text)

[**He** was there, looking at her] (p. 297)

Although in the rest of both texts Tony is often referred to in terms that highlight his mechanical nature, for example with the word “machine” in the source text and “macchina” [machine] in the target text, this beginning seems to indicate a difference that will be enhanced in the course of the story. One key point is when Tony explains the reasons of his ‘sympathetic’ behaviour towards Claire which, as he says, is linked to his inbuilt notion of ‘humanity’. The more a person fits with this notion, the freer he is in his actions. In the source text, the robot states that he is “manufactured to obey”, while in the target text he is “condizionato ad obbedire” [conditioned to obey] - something that is quite different as “manufactured” enhances his status as machine, while “condizionato” usually applies to living creatures.

Example 5

ST - I am **manufactured to obey**, but the extent of my obedience is for myself to determine. I can follow orders niggardly or liberally.

TT - Io sono stato **condizionato ad obbedire**, ma i limiti della mia obbedienza sono io a stabilirli. Posso eseguire gli ordini ricevuti alla lettera, ma ho una certa latitudine.

[I have been **conditioned to obey**, but the limits of my obedience, they are determined by me. I can execute the orders I receive very precisely, but I have some latitude] (p. 308)

In another passage, it is the narrative voice itself that seems to support the idea of Tony's humanity. This happens in one of the first scenes of 'intimacy' between Claire and Tony (Example 6).

Example 6

ST - **She hadn't imagined it**; his fingers had pressed hers, gently, tenderly, just before they moved away.

TT- **Non se l'era aspettato**: le dita di Tony avevano premuto le sue dolcemente, teneramente, prima di staccarsi.

[She hadn't expected that: Tony's fingers had gently, tenderly pressed hers, before they moved away] (p. 308)

In the ST, Tony's actions are filtered through Claire's thoughts, "She hadn't imagined it" hints at the possibility that, in fact, she imagined it, as it is clear that she is falling in love with the robot and - as it is typical of people in love - she looks for signs of the other person's interest. In Italian, this clause is rendered as "Non se l'era aspettato" [She hadn't expected it] changing entirely the truth value of the statement: in this case, the narrative voice simply seems to register Claire's surprise, thus supporting the idea the robot did press her fingers.

Another clear indicator of this different perspective in the Italian translation is the way in which the adjective "expressionless", used to describe the robot, is rendered in the target text. As can be seen from the examples below, the Italian translation opts for the adjectives "ermetica" [enigmatic, mysterious] in 7a) and "impassibile" [unmoved, unperturbed] in 7b), which are especially associated to the idea of screening emotions rather than not having them at all.

Example 7

a) ST - Claire looked at that **expressionless** face

TT - Claire guardò quella faccia **ermetica**

[Claire looked at that **inscrutable** face] (p. 308)

b) ST - Tony remained unresponsive and **expressionless**

TT - Questo rimase inerte e **impassibile**

[This remained motionless and unmoved] (p. 298)

c) ST - Tony was tall and darkly handsome, with an incredibly patrician air drawn into every line of his **unchangeable expression**

TT - Tony era alto e bello d'una bellezza tenebrosa, con un'aria incredibilmente patrizia impressa in ognuna delle sue **fattezze immutabili**

[Tony was tall and darkly handsome, with an incredibly patrician air drawn in each of his **unchanging features**] (p. 297)

An explanation of these changes may be seen in the influence of the cultural framework within which the target text is placed, particularly the importance of classical texts in Italian literature. This presence may be identified at the beginning of the story, where Tony is described as having an “unchangeable expression” (7c). This is rendered in Italian as “fattezze immutabili” [unchanging features], a phrase that evokes more the image of a statue than that of a robot, and here it is not difficult to see an allusion to the classic myth of Galatea and Pygmalion. In the same way that the love of Pygmalion brought life to the statue of Galatea, the love of Claire seems to transform the robot into something more human.

This interpretation is also hinted at by the Italian title. In the source text “Satisfaction Guaranteed” is a familiar marketing phrase which is used as an ironic commentary for a future so commodified that even unhappy housewives will find solace in the arms of “mechanical men”. In Italian, not only is the phrase “consolazione garantita” not an ‘advertising formula’ but the word “consolazione” [consolation, comfort] implies empathy, something that is innately human. This change also causes the

loss of a possible sexual connotation present in the original title. As a matter of fact, some renderings are characterised by a certain prudery in the target text, as in the following example (8).

Example 8

ST – His hand was in the **small of her back**, shoving

TT – La mano di Larry si posò sul **collo** della moglie, spingendola dolcemente in avanti

[Larry put his hand on his wife's **neck**, slowly pushing her forward] (p. 297)

In other instances, it is the target text that introduces sexual allusions, but these have a different connotation and tend to highlight Claire's innocence. For example, at the beginning Claire's husband tells her that the reason why she was chosen: "We must have a completely inexperienced tester". This rather impersonal statement is rendered in Italian as "soggetto del tutto digiuno in fatto di uomini meccanici" (p. 299), where the word "digiuno", which literally means "fasting", has also a sexual connotation as it is used figurately in the sense of "not having sex", so that Claire is presented as a sort of 'virgin', i.e. an innocent woman.

In conclusion, the target text tones down the "sexual connotation" of the source text, strengthens the love theme and the intertextual links with previous narratives of transformation of the inorganic into organic. Images from classical myths, but also the fable of *Pinocchio* (Collodi, 1881), resonate through the target text, which seems to offer another reading: the rejection of a mechanized world and the victory of the 'human' element over the machine.

- Translating the "otherness" of alien beings

As previously stated, the other fundamental SF trope to embody the concept of "non-human" is the figure of the "alien", i.e. an extraterrestrial (usually) intelligent being with whom the humans come into contact, usually coming in two types. Either the aliens are malevolent creatures, intent on destroying human beings and planet Earth, or they take the form of a benevolent race, often more advanced than the

Terrestrial civilizations. Whether they are hostile or friendly, aliens are considered as having an essential metaphorical meaning in science fiction. Parrinder sees them as having a reflexive level, and they are supposed to express some message about the nature of humanity (Parrinder, 1979/2014:155). Other commentators have seen them as having more specific symbolic values, as their “otherness” is often related to particular social groups, women or other marginalised groups (Roberts, 2000), or they may be seen as embodying the ‘enemy’ at particular historical moments, such as the ‘communists’ and ‘Russians’ thinly disguised as ‘aliens’ in 1950s American science fiction.

In *Le meraviglie del possibile* there are several stories involving aliens, creatures who may be hostile - such as the red and malevolent sphere in “Il duello” (Arena, 1944, Frederic Brown) - or benevolent as the friendly visitors of “Le immagini non mentono” (Pictures don’t lie, 1951, Katherine McLean), or belong to a higher civilisation discreetly surveilling Earth from afar, as in “Il doppio criminale” (Party of the Two Parts, 1954, William Tenn). In some cases, the “aliens” are already within, taking over the bodies of human beings⁸⁷ as in “Impostore” (Impostor, 1953, Philip K. Dick) or “L’ultimo dei marziani” (The Last Martian, 1950, Frederic Brown).

An interesting aspect related to the translation of the stories with aliens in *LMDP* was how to render the word “alien” in the sense of “sentient being from another part of the universe”⁸⁸. The Italian “alieno”, which shares with English the same Latin origin, “alienus”, did not include this meaning in the 1950s and would be introduced in Italian only later, obviously as a calque on the English. The Italian words used to render “alieno” vary depending on the kind of alien that features in the stories, but end up strengthening either the negative or the positive connotations. In the case of evil aliens, the chosen strategy is that of insisting on the concept of ‘foreignness’, as in “Il duello” [Arena] where the red sphere is described in terms of utter foreignness (Example 1)

⁸⁷ The infiltration of ‘aliens’ among human beings was a popular SF theme in the 1950s, which was made particularly famous by the film *The Invasion of the body snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956).

⁸⁸ This meaning was well-established in English by the 1950s as it was “first used by Carlyle and spread in the early decades of the 1900 in science fiction novels” (Prucher, 2009:2).

Example 1 - (From “Arena”/ “Il duello”)

ST – It was **alien**

TT- Era veramente un **essere estraneo a lui**

[It was a truly foreign being] (p. 140)

On the other hand, in the following examples, all taken from the translation of “Pictures don’t lie”, the friendly aliens are described with terms that have a more positive connotation than the English counterparts, such as the phrase “visitatore dello spazio” [visitor from space] (2a), or “abitanti di un altro mondo [inhabitants of another world] (2b), or even, in 2c), equalled to human beings - as the “alien’s face” becomes “viso dell’uomo” in Italian.

Example 2 - (From “Pictures don’t lie”/“Le immagini non mentono”)

a) ST - Welcome to the **aliens**

TT - Benvenuto ai **visitatori dello spazio**

[Welcome to the visitors from space] (p. 208)

b) ST - He was looking at **aliens**

TT- Egli vedeva gli **abitanti di un altro mondo**

[He was seeing the inhabitants of another world] (p. 209)

c) ST- There was a close-up of the **alien’s face**

TT - Apparve un primo piano del **viso dell’uomo**

[There appeared a close-up of the man’s face] (p. 211)

“Pictures don’t lie” is a first contact story, where human beings prepare to receive the visit of aliens after detecting their existence through radio communication. The story follows a familiar script, with the humans preparing to welcome the aliens who are supposedly friendly and very similar to them. Precautions are however taken, and together with the welcome committee a circle of artillery has been arranged around the area where the spaceship is supposed to land. The word “alien” is also maintained throughout, which, in spite of the positive assessment of the

extraterrestrial beings, still marks the existence of a border. In fact, a difference does exist, as the final twist shows that the aliens are so small that instead of landing in what should be free space they end up in a puddle on the tarmac, which they perceive as a sea full of monsters.

Example 3

ST – A half-circle of cliffs around the horizon. A wide muddy lake swarming with **swimming things**. Huge, strange white foliage all around the ship and incredibly **huge, pulpy monsters attacking and eating each other on all sides**.

TT – Un semicerchio di colline intorno all'orizzonte. Un grande lago melmoso brulicante di **esseri che nuotano**. Gigantesche foglie bianche tutt'intorno alla nave e **mostri enormi, incredibilmente grassi, che si attaccano e si divorano da ogni parte**.

[A half-circle of hills around the horizon. A big muddy lake swarming with swimming beings. Huge, white leaves all around the ship and huge monsters, incredibly fat, attacking and devouring each other on all sides] (p. 220)

The features of Earth seen from the perspective of the foreign visitors reverse the usual convention of the planet as a safe place and superimpose the image of the “alien planet” on it. While in the extract above the target text offers a fairly close translation of the passage, the ‘hellish’ nature of Earth will be emphasised in another section of the target text, where the translation diverges from the original to ironically describe Earth as Eden.

Example 4

ST - A good joke on us, the **weird place we evolved in**, the thing it did to us!

TT - Capite che scherzo gli ha fatto, **il nostro paradiso terrestre?**

[Do you see the trick that our heaven on Earth has played on them] (p. 221)

Another story where the theme of “alterity” is treated in an interesting way, as the target text creates a network of allusions to the target culture’s heritage, is

“Villaggio Incantato” (Enchanted Village, 1950, E. Van Vogt). The tale is about an astronaut, Bill Jenner, who is the sole survivor of the first expedition to Mars. The Martian environment is extremely hostile, a landscape made of sand and stone where vegetation is dry and brittle and fruits are inedible. Survival seems impossible, until Jenner arrives at a village obviously built for an alien form or life, so different that the target text strengthens the concept in Italian and ‘alien life’ is rendered as “Forme di una vita sconosciuta, inimmaginabile” [Form of unknown, unimaginable life] (p. 28).

The Village clearly represents the epitome of alterity, combining technology and alien life. In fact, Jenner comes to the conclusion that the Village itself is alive, a concept that again is strengthened in Italian with the addition of “organismo”

Example 5 – From “Enchanted Village”/“Villaggio incantato”

ST – This lonely village was **alive**

TT - Quel solitario villaggio era un **organismo vivente**

[That lonely village was a living organism] (p. 33)

Not only is it alive but it is made of a “living substance” which grew “into the shape of buildings, adjusting itself to suit another life form, accepting the role of servant in the widest meaning of the term.” Jenner’s task then will be to make the village understand that it will have to serve another master, providing food suitable for human beings. At first it seems that the village has understood Jenner’s needs, but in a final twist it becomes clear that it is Jenner who has adapted, that the village has changed him into a monster, albeit one fit to live in the alien place.

The theme of transformation and adaptation that characterizes this story is developed and reinforced in the target text. The story seems to contain allusions to the story of Ulysses. Like the hero of the Odyssey, Jenner travelled beyond the frontier of knowledge, setting up for a journey into the unknown. The theme of ‘transformation’ of man into an animal cannot but call to mind the episode of the Odyssey where Ulysses’ companions are turned into swine by the sorceress Circe.

There are many elements both in the source text and the target text that evoke this link. From the title itself “Enchanted Village”, closely translated into Italian as “Villaggio Incantato”, that encapsulates the story within a fantastic, mythical framework, to words such as “troughs”, translated with the corresponding Italian word “truogoli” (p. 40), which Jenner correctly identifies as the containers of food, but whose name hints at the ‘animal’ nature of the users. In particular, the “steamy mixture” that fills these troughs is rendered in Italian as “una fumante broda” [a steamy swill] (p. 40), where the term “broda” evokes the food given to pigs. Even the last sentence that describes Jenner’s new condition seems to strengthen this idea, as some of the words chosen in the target text evoke the idea of ‘bestial satisfaction’:

Example 6

ST - **Ecstatically** Jenner wriggled his four-foot-tail and lifted his long snout to let the thin streams of liquid wash away the food impurities that clung to his sharp teeth.

TT - In **un’estasi voluttuosa** Jenner agitò la gran coda fremente e alzò il muso oblungo, lasciando che i deliziosi getti di vapore gli mondassero i denti aguzzi delle impurità del cibo.

[In voluptuous ecstasy Jenner wriggled his big trembling tail and lifted his long snout, letting the delicious blasts of steam clean his sharp teeth from food impurities] (p. 41)

These words are “ecstatically”, to which the adjective “voluttuosa” [voluptuous] has been added, and the adjective “fremente” [trembling], which often collocates with “desiderio”.

Another interesting element is the presence of words evoking images of ‘purification’ and ‘atonement’. For example the verb “mondare” in the extract above, used to translate “wash away”, which often collocates with “peccato” [sin]. Earlier in the target text, the word “cilicio” [hair shirt] was used to render the verb “scorched” (Example 7).

Example 7

ST - hot, red, alien sand that **scorched** through his tattered clothes.

TT - torrida, rossiccia sabbia straniera, che trasformava i suoi cenci in un **cilicio rovente**

[scorching, reddish foreign sand, which turned his rags into a red-hot cilice]
(p. 25)

It seems that in the Italian text the transformation is connected to the idea of some form of purification.

3.8 Translating the “otherness” of America

As a I have previously argued, science fiction was widely perceived in Italy as an ‘American’ product, something that in *Le meraviglie del possibile* was highlighted in the paratexts of the anthology, with statements about the stories’ links to American literary tradition and the clear indication that the texts were ‘translations’. It was important however to see how this aspect was dealt with within the stories themselves, to find out whether the ‘foreignness’ of science fiction was maintained also at a textual level. In translation, one of the clearer indicators of the extent to which the target text has been distanced from the source text is the way in which culturally-bound words have been translated so, in this section, I will analyse a selection of these elements to see how they were mediated by the translators of *LMDP*.

I use the expression ‘culturally-bound words’ as a wide umbrella term to refer to all those textual elements that have a strong association with the source culture, and which can be of many types, extralinguistic and linguistic (Leppihalme, 1997:2-3). Culturally-bound words and expressions are by definition ‘untranslatable’, as they are so specific to the source culture that no corresponding term really exists in the target language. Translators may adopt different strategies to deal with these elements, ranging from taking over the term unchanged from the source text to signal “cultural foreignness”, to replacing the foreign word or expression with an indigenous one (Hervey and Higgins, 1992:28-30). Between these two extremes other solutions may be attempted. A particularly detailed grid has been devised by Franco Aixelà, who calls these elements Culture-Specific Items (CSI) and identifies

a number of intermediate steps between “conservation” - where “the translators keep as much as they can of the original reference” - and “naturalization” - where “the translator decides to bring the CSI into the intertextual corpus felt as specific by the target language culture” (Aixelà, 1996:61-63). In my discussion of the treatment of culturally-bound words and expressions in *Le meraviglie del possibile* I will especially refer to Aixelà’s grid.

In spite of the ‘extraterrestrial’ or ‘futuristic’ settings of the SF stories in *LMDP*, there are many elements that can be seen as ‘culturally-bound’. Typical cultural aspects are, for example, the names of places and people. These have, on the whole, been transferred without changes into the translations, maintaining what can be defined the ‘Anglo-American framework’ and showing that the stories are clearly set in an American context. In relation to other semantic areas, however, there has been a certain degree of ‘naturalisation’, with the effect of reducing the distance between American and Italian culture. One of the categories where this ‘domesticating’ strategy is more evident is the rendering of the names of food, which “is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (Newmark, 1988:97). The table below (Table 3) shows some examples of the way in which the references to ‘food’ have been translated and the various strategies adopted by translators. They range from ‘universalisation’, i.e. the employment of a less specific term, in the case of “hot dogs” translated as “salsicce” [sausages] (1e), and “cinnamon buns” translated as “frittelle” (1a), to the use of a less culture-specific item or “limited universalisation” as in the case of “torta al caffè” [coffee cake] for “black and white cake” (1f), to the ‘naturalisation’ of “bacon and eggs” which has been rendered as “pane e prosciutto” [bread and ham] (1d).

Table 3 – The translation of culturally bound words related to food in LMDP

Source Text	Target text	Observations
a) Cinnamon buns (The Long Rain, 1950, Ray Bradbury)	Frittelle (Pioggia senza fine, p. 59)	A “frittella” is a sort of sweet fried pastry, usually in the shape of a ring.
b) a cup, full [of chocolate], with a marshmallow in it (The Long Rain, 1950, Ray Bradbury)	Una tazza ricolma di crema vegetale e melassa (Pioggia senza fine, p. 59)	The term “crema vegetale” evokes a sort of creamy soup, melassa is the Italian for “treacle”.
c) thick sandwiches of rich chicken meat (The Long Rain, 1950, Ray Bradbury)	Grosse tartine di bianca carne di pollo (Pioggia senza fine, p. 59)	A “tartina” is a “canapé”, probably used because the type of bread used for “tartine” is very similar to the type used for “sandwiches”.
d) He didn’t feel like having bacon and eggs (The Test, 1954, Richard Matheson)	Nemmeno lui aveva più voglia di pane e prosciutto (L’esame, p. 453)	“Bacon and eggs” is replaced with “bread and ham”, which is much more culture specific.
e) We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs (The Veldt, 1950, Ray Bradbury)	Abbiamo fatto una scorpacciata di gelato di fragole e salsicce (Il Veldt, p. 470)	“salsicce” correspond to “sausages” and is an example of universalization
f) I wanted to get that black-and-white cake recipe (Zero Hour, 1947, Ray Bradbury)	Volevo la ricetta di quella torta al caffè (Ora zero, p. 543)	“Torta al caffè” is a “Coffee cake” and can be considered as an example of “limited universalisation” as it is a less culture specific type of cake.
g) A brandy ," Frelaine told the waiter (The Seventh Victim, 1953, Robert Sheckley)	-Un cognac - ordinò Frelaine al cameriere (La settima vittima, p. 437)	Cognac is a specific type of brandy, produced in France.

The choices made by translators in relation to the function and context of these terms are not always successful or clear. For example, some of these food references occur in “The Long Rain” and they are listed as types of desirable food, something the soldiers marching through the Venusian forest dream of having when they find shelter in the Sun Domes. So, the translation of “cinnamon buns” with “frittelle”, a sort of “fried doughnut” is close enough to the ST term’s function to be acceptable. On the other hand, the choice of “crema vegetale e melassa” to render “hot chocolate” and “marshmallow” not only does evoke a far less clear image, since “crema vegetale” is rather vague and “melassa” is not very familiar to Italians, but they also do not sound particularly appetising, missing the point of the reference in the source text.

Also, the choice of “tartina” for “sandwich” (1c) appears rather odd. Although in the 1950s the term “sandwich” was probably not as widely used in Italy as it is nowadays, it seems strange that the translators did not resort to a word such as “tramezzino” or even “panino”, which are much closer to the ST term. The word “tartina” usually refers to small pieces of bread topped with some savouries, served as appetisers, something that, given the context, does not seem appropriate. Another choice difficult to explain is the rendering of “pane e prosciutto” for ‘bacon and eggs’ (1d). This reference occurs in “L’esame” (The test, 1954, Richard Matheson), in a scene where the characters are having breakfast. The shift in this case seems strange, because not only “bacon and eggs” is perfectly translatable in Italian as ‘uova e pancetta’ but also because the latter is a well-known food item of “Anglo-American” culture. “Pane e prosciutto”, apart from introducing a target culture element in the source text, is not typically associated with breakfast.

These target culture-oriented strategies were applied not only to the translation of food but also in relation to other references to American society and institutions. In “Servocittà” (Dumb Waiter, 1952, Walter Miller Jr.), a story with many references to city services, “police station” is rendered as “commissariato”, instead of the more literal and less culturally-bound “stazione di polizia”, “security card” is translated as “mutua”, a widespread informal term for the national health system. Words like

“commissariato” and “mutua” that are closely associated with Italian culture⁸⁹ produce an odd effect within the context of “Servocittà”, set in an extremely mechanised city in a post atomic landscape.

Target culture-oriented strategies were also applied in relation to references to American popular culture. In “Un uomo esemplare” (Man of distinction, 1951, Frederic Brown), a humorous story about the abduction of a drunkard by aliens, the narrative voice tells of how the aliens learned about Earth’s customs and language by listening to radio broadcasts.

Example 1 – (From “A Man of Distinction”/“Un uomo esemplare”)

ST - Can you imagine trying to picture the life of inhabitants of Earth by listening to a mixture of **giveaway contests, soap operas, Charlie McCarthy and the Lone Ranger?**

TT - Vi pare che si possa avere un’idea della vita che fanno gli abitanti della Terra ascoltando i **concorsi musicali, gli indovinelli a premio e i comunicati pubblicitari?**

[Can you imagine one getting an idea of the life lived by the inhabitants of Earth by listening to singing contests, quiz shows and advertisements?]
(p. 227)

The ironic references of the narrator to cultural items that are clearly American are rendered in Italian with a string of apparently more neutral cultural terms (Example 1), losing a bit of the irony of the original. On the other hand, it is quite easy to recognise behind the general wording the typical programmes of Italian radio and television in the Fifties, from the “concorsi musicali” [singing contests] that were quite popular at the time, such as the “Festival di Sanremo”, to the “indovinelli a premio” [quiz show] the first one of which, *Lascia o raddoppia*, aired on Italian TV in 1955 and became a cultural phenomenon.

⁸⁹ These words would, for example, be employed a few years later in Italian films such as *Il commissario* (1962, Comencini) and *Il medico della mutua* (1968, Zampa) both with Alberto Sordi, one of the actors that best impersonated *l’italiano medio* [‘Italian everyman’] (Rigoletto, 2007:33).

It is interesting to note that some of these terms would be probably left in English nowadays, as words such as “sandwich” and “hot dog” are widely known in Italy. It is also possible that while the literal translation of some expressions was possible, i.e. “stazione di polizia” for “police station”, there was a preference towards naturalizing items rather than introducing phrases that perhaps sounded ‘marked’. It must also be noted that in some cases the ‘cultural reference’ was completely erased or rewritten, probably because it was perceived as redundant or incomprehensible, for example in the following examples from “La casa nuova” (...and he built a crooked house, 1941, Heinlein):

Example 2 – (From “...and he built a crooked house”/“La casa nuova”)

2a) ST - High up on Lookout Mountain at number 8775, across the street from the Hermit—the original Hermit of Hollywood—lived Quintus Teal, graduate architect.

TT - Proprio in fondo a Lookout Mountain, al numero 8775, viveva Quintus Teal, architetto laureato.

[Right at the end of Lookout Mountain, at number 8775, lived Quintus Teal, graduate architect] (p.391)

2b) ST - Even the architecture of southern California is different. Hot dogs are sold from a structure built like and designated "The Pup." Ice cream cones come from a giant stucco ice cream cone, and neon proclaims "**Get the Chili Bowl Habit!**" from the roofs of buildings which are indisputably **chili bowls**

TT - Anche l'architettura è differente nella California Meridionale. Salsicciotti caldi sono in vendita in una costruzione eretta in forma di salsicciotto. I coni gelati provengono da un gigantesco cono gelato di stucco e grandi lettere al neon proclamano: «**Bevete birra!**» dai tetti di palazzo che sono senz'ombra di dubbio **boccali di birra**.

[Even the architecture is different in southern California. Hot sausages are sold in a structure built in the shape of a sausage. Ice cream cones come from a giant stucco ice cream cone and big neon letters proclaim: «Drink beer!» from the roofs of buildings which are without a doubt beer mugs.] (p. 391)

In 2a) the reference to “The Hermit” has been erased, probably because it was perceived as too obscure and not particularly relevant. More interesting is the replacement of “Chili Bowl” with “boccale di birra” [beer mug] (2b) which was obviously meant to maintain a sort of cultural link since in Italy drinking beer is usually associated with Anglo-American culture. On the other hand, the introduction of such an item appears rather problematic, as it creates an extralinguistic reference whose existence is not certain, unless the translators knew for sure that in California there are places selling beer which have a “beer mug” on the roof. This seems akin to what Aixelà defines as “Autonomous creation”, i.e. the introduction of “some nonexistent cultural reference in the source text” which is comprehensibly “a very little-used strategy” (Aixelà, 1996:64).

In any case, as I have shown, in most cases the translations of culture-specific items were target culture-oriented, doing what has been described as bringing the source culture towards the target culture reader, attenuating the ‘foreignness’ of the text and making the texts easier to understand for the readers. In doing so, however, the translators created culturally hybrid texts, for the “Anglo-American” framework of the stories acquires a distinctly Italian ‘flavour’.

3.9 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile*, a unique product at the time of its publication as it negotiated the repositioning of science fiction from a marginalized popular genre to a legitimate literary form. In my discussion I have illustrated that this repositioning was achieved through a number of elements, among which the cultural power of the mediators and the adoption of paratextual features usually associated with ‘high’ literature. In addition, as I discussed in the previous sections, this literary element was further enhanced in the translations through the adoption of elegant, literary images evoking classical myths.

In my analysis, I also showed how the success of the anthology was possibly linked to contextual factors, identified in the particular time of publication, the late 1950s when Italy was going through radical transformations in relation to its social,

cultural and economic structures. The Italy of the 'miracolo economico' was a country where anxieties about the future and a desire for modernity mingled, where the American way of life and its values were simultaneously feared and longed for. These issues partly emerge from Solmi's Preface, a text where the editor revisits some of the topics discussed in his 1953 essay. One in particular is the danger represented by the uncontrolled development of science and technology, an image especially linked to the bombing of Hiroshima and the "immagine dell'umanità sull'orlo del proprio suicidio" [the image of humanity on the brink of suicide] (Solmi, 1992:x). It is the duty of science fiction then, as a new form of fairy tale for current times, or "folklore atomico" (Solmi, 1992:xii) as he defines it, to caution humanity about such dangers. The translations represent the narrative counterpart to these arguments.

The popularity of the anthology in the following years and the appearance of other similar collections indicate how throughout the 1960s these issues continued to be perceived as important. This is something that was picked up by Carlo Izzo, a scholar of English Literature, who in an essay originally written in 1963 commented on how *Le meraviglie del possibile* and other SF anthologies represented an answer to contemporary anxieties

Sulla base, almeno, delle antologie ricordate, appare chiaro che all'ottocentesco ottimismo cui già lucidamente irrideva il Leopardi, si è sostituito il convincimento che scatenando forze troppo più potenti di lui, l'uomo è avviato verso orrori indicibili, mostruosità superiori a ogni immaginazione e, infine, all'annientamento totale⁹⁰ (Izzo, 1967:244)

⁹⁰[On the basis, at least, of the mentioned anthologies, it is clear that 19th century optimism, which had already been lucidly mocked by Leopardi, has been replaced by the persuasion that by unleashing forces that are far more powerful than mankind, the latter is heading towards unspeakable horrors, monstrosities superior to every imagination and, finally, towards total annihilation.]

CHAPTER IV
RE-VISIONING ANGLO-AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION
AN ANALYSIS OF PARATEXTUAL FEATURES IN SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS
IN ITALY IN THE 1970S

4.1 Introduction

As a number of critics have noted, in the 1970s the field of Italian science fiction was characterised by the launch of the so-called “collane da libreria” [bookshop series] (Valla, 1975:362; Iannuzzi, 2015:54-57), to distinguish them from the SF series and magazines previously sold at newsstands. These new series showed more sophistication overall and, to a certain extent, appeared to uphold the strategy of raising the cultural status of the genre by adopting the publishing conventions of ‘serious’ literature, as the Einaudi anthology and the *SFBC* books had attempted in earlier years.

This chapter will focus on the book-series launched by the following publishers: Libra, Nord and Fanucci. Given that I am dealing with a large corpus of texts, the analysis will focus on the paratexts - those elements that, following Gérard Genette’s formulation, surround the text and extend it (Genette, 1997:1), such as the title, the illustrations, the presentational blurbs and so on. The reason for my choice is that I want to argue that these elements played a key role in promoting a change of status for science fiction in the Italian literary hierarchy, but also in providing a critical perspective through which readers could examine science fiction. In particular, I argue that the verbal and visual strategies adopted by the publishers in presenting the books produced a “distancing” discourse, that invited readers to assume a critical detachment from the narrative matter with which they were about to engage - a perspective that can be connected with the specific socio-cultural context of the time.

Before I proceed, I should specify that I have not considered all paratextual elements as being of equal importance. I have especially focused on the titles and cover illustrations, as these elements are in the foreground and it is logical to

assume that publishers concentrated on them for their representational strategies since they would likely have most impact on a potential reader (McCracken, 1998:12). At the same time, because titles and cover illustrations are also part of a paratextual “whole”, I have included other elements in my analysis, such as the publicity blurbs on the cover, and I have examined the overall effect resulting from the combination of the visual and verbal components.

My analysis is divided in three parts. In the first part, I examine a corpus of translated titles, framing my analysis within a discussion about the problems of analysing titles. In the second part, I analyse the illustrations on the covers of the selected science fiction books. In the last section, I show how, drawing especially on Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design (2006), it is possible to see covers as examples of multimodal texts and, as such, conveyers of particular messages.

4.2 What is a title?

Although apparently simple, titles are complicated textual elements, whose definition and function are not as straightforward as they may appear. In his seminal work on paratexts, Gérard Genette describes them as “as elements whose main aim is to identify the text” and he highlights three functions: “to designate, to indicate subject matter, to tempt the public” (Genette, 1997:76). By doing this, however, they also function as “thresholds” to the text, pushing the interpretation of the work in a certain direction.

Genette mainly conducts his analysis on classic and canonical literature and his conclusions cannot always be applied to popular genres. More recently, Daniel Couégnas has dealt with the topic of titles in popular fiction or, as he defines it, in “paralittérature”⁹¹ (1997:25-32), drawing on Genette’s work and applying it to popular genres. In particular Couégnas observes how, with the progressive establishing of a specific identity for popular genres, their titles became

⁹¹ The terms “para-literature” or “paraletteratura”, are frequently used in France and in Italy to refer to popular fiction. See Chapter I for a discussion of the different terms used to refer to popular literature and their ideological implications.

increasingly simpler, as other elements on the book cover contributed to highlight the generic nature of the narrative (Couégnas, 1997:28). He also notes that titles of popular literature have a close relationship with the text they refer to, as they tend to relate to it in a “literal” way, focusing for example on the central object of the text or the central character (Couégnas, 1997:31). In addition, this ‘transparent’ relationship between title and text seems to be more typical of popular genres than ‘serious’ or canonical literature, where titles tend to relate less directly to the book content (Couégnas, 1997:29). The idea that there is a more ‘transparent’ relationship between title and text in popular genres, highlighted by Couégnas, is shared by other scholars. George Slusser, for example, notes that “science fiction titles (...) make their words, instead of a barrier to the story inside, a visual point of entry - an icon working, in concert with the images on the cover, to unfold the mimetic possibilities of the text.” (Slusser, 1989:103).

In Couégnas’ study, the titles of popular literature are seen as the product of a historical and cultural process leading to the separation between popular genres and canonical literature. Such a schism was gradually and increasingly reflected in the paratextual elements of the books, which embedded the “identity” of the different types of literature in the material aspects of the books themselves (cf. Couégnas, 1997:28). This means that the titles of popular literature acquire meaning also in relation to the position and identity of other literary forms, and may be seen as depending on “the literary conventions and intertextual relationships existing in a particular culture” (Nord, 1995:262). In addition, both Genette and Couégnas acknowledge that the function of a title is not only that of identifying the text but also of “seducing” the potential reader⁹², although they do not investigate the question in depth. However, it is clear this ‘seducing’ requires exploiting the residual elements of a title, its connotative potential rather than its denotative meaning. Titles then must be able to evoke particular ideas and images so as to persuade the reader to buy the book, i.e. they must be culturally significant. Neither

⁹² Genette mentions this function but does not seem to think too much of it, apparently because of the difficulty to pinpoint it as it is “so obvious and so elusive” (Genette, 1997:91) and he links it with the connotative value of a title. Couégnas also sees “seduction” as an effect of connotation and implies that this function especially characterises popular fiction: “Questo modo di chiamare in causa direttamente il lettore potenziale, di sollecitare con insistenza la sua partecipazione emotiva, caratterizza indiscutibilmente il modello paraletterario” (Couégnas, 1997:33).

Genette nor Couégnas examined translated literature, but it is clear that when a title is translated this complicated network of references and relationships is likely to change, both for linguistic and cultural reasons.

4.3 Translating titles

The cultural aspect of entitling seems to have been only of marginal concern to the first scholars who studied titles, who were mainly interested in defining and describing them from a textual point of view. This element has however been addressed with various degrees of emphasis in studies of translated titles where the comparison between the original titles and their rendering in another language has shown how translated titles may diverge widely from the original source. Since the reasons for such changes are not always apparent, one possible explanation is that different cultural values were at play in the target culture, and titles had to rely on a different repertoire of images, references and traditions to make sense to the readers. Christiane Nord, for example, examines the question of titles in a multilingual corpus of texts of different genres, with the aim of identifying not only their communicative function but also their culture-specific and generic characteristics (Nord, 1996:262). Although she does not consider the seductive function (which she calls appellative) as fundamental, she identifies different patterns and stylistic choices in her corpus that she ascribes to cultural preferences rather than linguistic constraints.

The importance of the “seductive” function is instead highlighted by Maurizio Viezzi in his study of Italian translations of English films, where he notes that “Quale che sia la gamma delle funzioni individuabili, ad assumere un ruolo predominante e ad essere costantemente perseguita - sia pure con scelte non sempre felici - è la funzione che Pascua Febles ha chiamato *seductora*” (Viezzi, 2004:260)⁹³. The cultural aspect of entitling also plays an important role in Helen T. Frank’s study of the way in which Australian specificity is rendered in French translations of titles of children’s animal stories (Frank, 2005:111). Frank also stresses the importance of

⁹³ [Regardless of the range of functions that can be identified, the function to assume a dominant role and to be constantly pursued – though choices are not always happy ones – it is the one that Pascua Febles has called *seductora*.]

titles for today's' publishers and authors "to engage readers" and shows the diachronic aspect of this factor, recalling how Charles Dickens spent a long time choosing the title for a new work. (*Ibid*). Frank's research has represented a useful point of reference for my analysis, as she applies a broad cultural framework to "determine how consistently translations reflect changes that may be attributed to the translators' emphasis on the source culture, the target culture and 'universals' of translation" (Frank, 2005:113). In addition, she considers the role played by the illustration on the covers, noting the various functions they may have, from reinforcing the generic aspects of the story, to providing information left out in the title.

4.4 The analysis of the corpus of translated science fiction titles

The analysis in the present chapter is based on a corpus of 286 titles of books published between 1968 and 1979 by publishers Nord, Libra and Fanucci that, as previously stated, are considered the most important publishers of science fiction in this period and agents of innovation (cf. Curtoni, 1978:205-206). The great majority of these titles refer to translations of Anglo-American novels, with few foreign or Italian novels, thus showing how science fiction continued to be interpreted as an Anglo-American phenomenon.⁹⁴

Since, as Nord says, entitling is regulated by the "formal, syntactic and stylistic norms and conventions (...) used in a particular culture" (Nord, 1998:272), it is possible to assume that any difference in the translated titles represent a reflection of these norms and conventions. Hence, the rationale I have adopted for my analysis is to divide my corpus into three main groups, on the basis of the extent of intervention on the original texts. As I will show, some deviations and changes were unavoidable, because of grammatical constraints or because of strong cultural bonds with the source text. In other cases, however, there must have been

⁹⁴ While attempts had been made to promote the "Italian way to science fiction", with some critics and editors supporting Italian writers and even the creation of *Futuro* in 1963, an SF magazine solely hosting Italian writers, the lack of success of these enterprises shows that science fiction continued to be perceived as an Anglo-American phenomenon (See Iannuzzi, 2014 and 2015, for a critical evaluation of *Futuro* and the inclusion of Italian writers in Italian SF book-series and magazines between the 1950s and the 1970s).

reasons connected with the target culture literary conventions, or perhaps even due to the mediators' idiosyncrasies.

Table 4 - Corpus of books analysed for the translation of titles

PUBLISHER	LIBRA	LIBRA	NORD	NORD	FANUCCI	FANUCCI
SERIES	I Classici della Fanta- scienza	Slan. Fanta- scienza	Cosmo Oro. Classici di fanta- scienza	Cosmo Argento. Collana di fanta- scienza	Orizzonti. Capolavori di fanta- scienza	Futuro. Biblioteca di fanta- scienza
Period	1969- 1979	1968- 1979	1970- 1979	1970- 1979	1973-1979	1973-1979
Number of books	41	48	40	92	18	48
Translations from English	37	47	39	87	18	48
Translations from French	3		1			
Italian	1	1		4		
Translations from Russian				1		
Literal translations	13	22 + 3 B ⁹⁵	19 + 2 B	27 + 5 B	9	15 + 1B
Rewritten titles	18	13	16	30	5	23
Mixed group	8	10	2	25	4	9

Table 4 shows the number of books taken into consideration for each publisher and series, and how the titles have been divided on the basis of the extent of intervention on them. In the first group I placed titles that can be regarded as “closely”⁹⁶ translated into Italian, i.e. with no obvious deviations from the original. For example, *The Book of Ptath* was published by Libra as *Il libro di Ptath* [The Book of Ptath]⁹⁷, which is a literal rendering of the original. In this group I have also

⁹⁵ B = borrowing

⁹⁶ I use the expression “close translation” to refer to translations that attempt to reproduce the syntactic structure and semantic meaning of the ST, within the limits of grammatical correctness (See Bajaj on the key concept of “Fidelity” in translation, 2009:188).

⁹⁷ Following Helen T. Frank’s system, I have placed back translations of titles between square brackets, while original titles, either in English or in Italian, are indicated in italics.

included those titles that are slightly different from the original because, for example, they introduce linguistic elements for grammatical constraints, but without altering the meaning in a significant way. This is the case of *Planet in the Eye of Time*, translated as *Il pianeta nell'occhio del tempo* [The planet in the Eye of **the** time] in the Cosmo Argento Series, where the introduction of the article “Il” before “pianeta” and before “tempo” is grammatically necessary⁹⁸.

In the second group there are titles that have been completely rewritten and show no semantic correspondence or similarity with the original titles, such as *Time is the Simplest Thing* translated as *Pescatore di stelle* [Fisherman of stars] by Fanucci, or *One Against Time* rendered as *Il cervello esploso* [The exploded brain] by Nord. I should add that some are retranslations or revised editions of previously published translations⁹⁹, so a number of these titles appeared in previous editions by other publishers. However, since the new publishers were in a position to change these titles (and sometimes they did), I have retained them in the corpus as an indication that they still satisfied the new publisher's taste.

There is also another group, which I defined as “mixed” and which includes those titles that are particularly problematic, as they cannot be placed either in the group of close translations of the originals or among the new renderings.

The figures in Table 4 show a certain balance between the two main groups of “closely” translated titles and titles that have been re-invented. There are some differences, but they do not seem significant, and this could be due to the fact that there was not an overwhelming tendency towards either “literal” or “free” translation. It is interesting to note that among the literally translated titles, there are some cases of ‘borrowing’, that is to say of direct transfer of a word in the TT, without any modification, a term originally employed by Vinay and Darbenet in their study of translation strategies (Shuttleworth and Cowie, 2014:17). These cases are

⁹⁸ Other inclusions have been more problematic, because of register variations with the consequences of added meaning. This is the case of *The Long Afternoon of Earth* rendered as *Il lungo meriggio della Terra*, a literal translation but for the word used to translate Afternoon: “meriggio” is a synonym of the standard “pomeriggio” with very literary connotations (the first lines of a famous poem by Eugenio Montale comes to mind: “Merigiare pallido e assorto...”).

⁹⁹ This is especially true of the novels in the series dedicated to the classics of science fiction such as *I classici della fantascienza* published by Libra and *Cosmo Oro* published by Nord.

interesting because they could be, occasionally, quite obscure. This seemed to happen especially when the original title was a proper name, perhaps because the mediators could rely on the readers' generic knowledge and their understanding that a proper name probably referred to the name of a planet or an extraterrestrial race. This is the case, for example, for *Maske:Thaery*, published by Nord or *Skaith!* published by Libra, where both titles refer to extraterrestrial worlds which remain in the original in Italian. Particularly worthy of note is the case of a trilogy where the first two titles are completely changed into Italian and made more transparent: *The Anome*= *Il mondo di Durdane* [The World of Durdane] and *The Brave Free Men*= *Il popolo di Durdane* [The people of Durdane], while the third one, *The Asutra* is simply rendered as *Asutra* in Italian, perhaps because, by the time the third volume was published, readers had become familiar with the story.

In other cases, retaining the original title was less of a problem: for example *City*, published by Libra, was certainly retained as the term is by now an assimilated borrowing in Italian. *Deus Irae* was also not problematic since the Latin phrase would presumably be more comprehensible to an Italian reader than the original English-speaking target readers. In any case, it seems that these new publishers relied on a community of loyal readers, purchasing the books regularly and knowledgeable about science fiction, its authors and works, rather than on new or occasional readers.¹⁰⁰

- Closely translated titles

In this group there are straightforward translations, almost "word-for-word" renderings with no grammatical or semantic deviations to note apart from, in places, the presence or lack of articles due to linguistic constraints in the target language, as in *Telepathist* translated as *Il telepatico* [The Telepathist]. They are mainly noun phrases, with a high percentage of the type Noun + prepositional phrase. This nominal structure is particularly frequent in the Italian group because it has to be used to translate not only the English "of-genitive", but also titles with

¹⁰⁰ The formation of groups of committed readers and followers was a specific feature of science fiction, both in the US and in other countries where SF has been imported, including Italy (cf. Edwards, 1994:130).

the 's genitive, and when a noun is used to pre-modify another noun¹⁰¹ because these structures do not exist in the Italian grammatical system (see Table 2 for examples of the three structures). This means not only that Italian titles have a higher rate of structural repetitiveness, but also that there is a greater tendency towards disambiguation and possible loss of meaning. This is especially true with the English noun+ noun structure, since here syntactic links are implied and the semantic relationship between the two words has to be provided by the reader. For example, in *Past Master* by R.A. Lafferty, translated as *Mastro del passato* [Master of the past], the title refers to the humanist Thomas More, who is teletransported into a utopian society in the distant future to help with moral issues. In both English and Italian titles, the most obvious interpretation is that of “Master belonging to the past”, however, given that More travels into the future, another possible interpretation is that of “Master from the past”. While in English this second meaning is potentially present, in Italian the preposition “da” should be used instead of “di” for the phrase to acquire this meaning, with the consequent rendering of *Maestro dal passato*.

Table 5 – Translated titles with a high percentage of noun phrases in the 1970s book series

	English title	Italian translation
N + of + Prepositional Phrase		
	The Sign of the Unicorn	Il segno dell'unicorno
	The Masks of Time	Le maschere del tempo
	Citizen of the galaxy	Cittadino della galassia
Noun + Noun		
	The Moon Children	I figli della Luna
	The Mind Parasites	I parassiti della mente
	Destiny Doll	La bambola del destino
S-genitive	Shakespeare's Planet	Il pianeta di Shakespeare
	Dragon's Island	L'isola del drago

¹⁰¹ See Quirk and Greenbaum's *A University Grammar of English* (1973) for grammatical terms used and definitions.

- Rewritten titles

About one third of the corpus consists of rewritten titles, i.e. titles that were newly created since the original ones had obviously presented some kind of problem. Although, as I stated earlier, it seems that on the whole publishers tended towards a faithful translation of titles, the number of rewritten titles is high enough to be significant and an indication that “faithfulness” was not the only criterion at work. The reasons why titles were changed are not always clear. Sometimes these reasons are obvious, for example when the original title is linguistically difficult to translate, as in *The Byworder*, where the English neologism (referring to a sort of future bohemian artist) had to be rendered in a different way and was published by Fanucci as *Il vagabondo degli spazi* [The Space Wanderer]. In other cases, the title may contain a reference to the ST culture which would be difficult to render into Italian: an example is *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* with its reference to *The Voyage of the Beagle*, the journal in which Charles Darwin recorded his voyages of exploration¹⁰², that must have been considered too obscure for Italian readers and thus changed into *Naufragio nell'ignoto* [Shipwreck into the Unknown]. Elsewhere, the title was changed even in the absence of any obvious linguistic or cultural problem, for example *Thorns*, which was changed to *Brivido crudele* [Cruel shivering], or *Flesh* which became *Il figlio del sole* [The son of the sun]. Perhaps these titles were considered of little impact and not strong enough from the point of view of generic identity.

On the other hand, changes were also made for which I can offer no explanation, for example when the title was both translatable and genre-specific as in the case of *The Alien Way*, translated as *Esche nello spazio* [Baits in space]. Other changes can be justified for cultural reasons, for example it is likely that *Isle of the Dead*¹⁰³ was changed into *Metamorfosi cosmica* [Cosmic metamorphosis], and *Cemetery World* into *I giorni del silenzio* [The days of silence], to avoid the image of death in the title which is more typical of other genres, such as thrillers or horror novels. This need to maintain generic distinctiveness (cf. Nord, 1995:265) would also

¹⁰² Darwin's journal went through many editions and was published under different titles, but *The Voyage of the Beagle* is the name most commonly used for this famous text (Freeman, 1977).

¹⁰³ This title was apparently inspired by a painting by Arnold Böcklin entitled *The Isle of the Dead* which is also mentioned in the novel.

explain why a title like *Satan's World* was changed into *Mondo Rovente* [Burning World]: since the title could be perfectly rendered in a close translation as "*Il mondo di Satana*", it must be hypothesised that this rendering was avoided because of its contiguity with the imagery of gothic literature.

- "Mixed" titles

I included in this group all titles that retained one or more literally translated words, but also presented some sort of deviation from the source text which was not caused by simple linguistic constraints, and where there was an element of choice for the translator. This is a heterogeneous category, given that the borders between this group and the other two are not very clear-cut and perhaps it would be better to place these titles along a line, going from the items that are lexically and syntactically fairly close to the original texts, to titles that, in spite of retaining some items from the originals, convey a rather different meaning. It is interesting to note that this may be a recurrent problem in the translation of titles, as other studies present the same problem. For example, Helen T. Frank identifies the category of "semi-literal translations" in her study of titles of Australian children's literature translated into French, defining them as titles that "retain one or more keywords from the original title with the addition of wording that does not affect the meaning or generic classification of the work" (Frank, 2005:119-20). Although changes of meaning and genre are not always as easy to describe as one would wish, this definition has represented a useful point of reference for my research, since I have also identified titles that could be seen as "semi-literal translations".

These are titles that replicate the grammatical structure of the original and present only a slight variation, in that one of the terms is rendered with a word that may be a synonym or, as in the case of "armi" in example 2 below, a super-ordinate.

- 1) *The Dreaming Jewels* = *Cristalli sognanti* [Dreaming crystals]
- 2) *The Guns of Avalon* = *Le armi di Avalon* [The Weapons of Avalon]
- 3) *The corridors of time* = *Le gallerie del tempo* [The Galleries of Time]
- 4) *The Power of Blackness* = *La potenza delle tenebre* [The Power of darkness]

In the first three titles, meaning is not affected in a significant way while what is worth noticing is how in Italian there has been a clear effort towards “literariness” since the chosen words are somewhat more poetic than other possible literal translations. This may be seen as an important hint towards the kind of norms followed by the mediators, i.e. adherence to certain stylistic features was more important than close translation or, in some cases, generic clarity. This is particularly evident in *The Power of Blackness*, where the word “blackness” of the title clearly relates to the main element of the plot, a black hole eating other planets. “Blackness” was not rendered in Italian with the more literal and less elegant “oscurità” or the rather marked “nerezza”, but with “tenebre” - a term with biblical associations and strong gothic overtones, evoking images that belong more to the tradition of “horror” literature than science fiction. In “The Guns of Avalons”, the use of “armi” [weapons] instead of the literal “cannoni” may have been adopted both for its alliterative element and to avoid confusion with the well-known action film “I cannoni di Navarone” [The Guns of Navarone] (1961, Thompson), set during the Second World War.

The same tendency may also be observed in other titles that sacrifice more literal renderings for stylistic reasons, as in *Police your planet = Veglia sul tuo pianeta* where the word “police” has been rendered with “veglia” [keep vigil] rather than the more literal “controlla” or “vigila”. Awkward renderings in Italian, be they linguistic or semantic, are avoided and “poetic” solutions are found, for example in *The Stars My Destination*, rendered as the smoother and more impersonal *Destinazione Stelle* [Destination: the Stars]. Normalization takes place too to render neologisms, as in *The Cometeers = Il popolo della cometa* [The people of the comet] or in *Orbitsville = Sfera orbitale* [Orbital sphere]. Grammatical deviations are normalised, as evidenced by the following examples where the marked use of “forever” is rendered with more acceptable collocations in Italian: *The Battle of Forever = Battaglia per l’eternità* [Battle for the eternity]; *The Forever War = Guerra eterna* [Eternal war]. Together with a tendency to literariness, these titles also show a preference for simplification, often following the structural pattern of Noun + Prepositional phrase as in *The Word for world is forest = Il mondo della foresta*

[The world of the forest] or *The Tar-Aiym Krang = Il mistero del Krang* [The Mystery of the Krang], *Wolfbane = Il segno del lupo* [The sign of the wolf].

Semantic normalization can also occur, as in the rendering of titles such as *The fabulous riverboat* with its reference to a type of ship typical of American rivers, into the more clichéd phrase *Alle sorgenti del fiume* [At the sources of the river], evocative of adventure and exploration. In one case, normalization went as far as using a collocation harking back to specific Italian social issues: the title *Talents incorporated* was rendered into the effective but slightly sinister ***L'anonima talenti*** [Talents Anonymous] a combination that recalls the delinquent Italian organisation known as “**L'anonima sequestri**” [emphasis mine in both examples].¹⁰⁴

4.5 Interpreting the results

The first observation that can be made after this analysis is that when we look at the numbers of closely translated titles and rewritten titles, there is no significant difference between them. A certain balance is seen between the two groups which can be interpreted as the presence of two opposing translation orientations among the publishers. On the one hand, publishers needed to respect the source texts and provide accurate translations, as dictated by their explicit policy and the desire of distancing themselves from previous practices in relation to the translation of science fiction. On the other hand, making science fiction acceptable as a cultural product meant respecting the target culture's conventions in terms of “literary works”. From this point of view, the group of translated titles that I defined as “mixed” proved very useful in detecting which “norms” were perceived as having priority. For example, it may be hypothesized that literal translation was the preferred strategy when it did not clash with the target culture's literary conventions as, in this case, adherence to the desired stylistic criteria was preferred. It looks to me as if stylistic acceptance was perceived as more important than slight shifts in meaning and generic appropriateness.

¹⁰⁴ Also known as “L'anonima sarda”, this criminal organisation specialised in kidnappings and it became notorious in the 1970s for the kidnapping of well-known public figures, such as that of Italian singer Fabrizio De André and his wife in 1979.

Respect for familiar forms can also be identified at the structural level, given that certain grammatical patterns were clearly more favoured than others. In particular, the Noun + Prepositional Phrase structure seems to be the preferred choice as it appears very frequently across the three groups. This hypothesis is supported by the findings of Margherita Di Fazio Alberti who, in the 1980s, conducted an analysis of Italian titles in popular genres, including science fiction¹⁰⁵ and showed how the use of nominal structures is a constant trend in Italian entitling of popular literature.¹⁰⁶ Considering the varieties of the original titles and that the mediators did not always need to use a nominal structure to render the ST title, it appears to me that by choosing nominal structures these mediators were respecting the conventions of the target culture and readers' expectations.

From a semantic point of view, that is to say the recurrence of words conveying particular images, what is noticeable is a general tendency to avoid confusing titles, titles that did not conform to the traditional imagery of science fiction. The Italian renderings generally tended to avoid genre ambiguity, and respect what Roberts defines as the "stock themes and situations" of science fiction, i.e. references to spaceships and space travel, aliens, robots and genetic engineering, computers and virtual reality, time travel, alternative history, utopias and dystopias (Roberts, 2000:15). This feature is especially evident in the group of titles that were rewritten, as it is clear from the examples in the following list:

¹⁰⁵ Di Fazio Alberti analysed five genres: melodrama, romance, adventure, detective fiction and crime fiction using a semiotic grid where she took note of the occurrence of the following elements: references to characters, time and place; semantic fields; grammatical structures.

¹⁰⁶ Di Fazio Alberti also notices how in the 1980s some genres showed a tendency to include what she defines as "titoli dialogici" [dialogic titles], i.e. titles that establish a more direct and emotional relationship with the reader (1984:101).

Table 6 - Examples of rewritten titles

ORIGINAL TITLE	ITALIAN TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION
<i>The Still, Small Voices of Trumpets</i>	<i>Ai margini della galassia</i> (CA Nord)	At the edge of the galaxy
<i>No One Goes There Now</i>	<i>Civiltà di prova</i> (CA Nord)	Civilization on trial
<i>Traitor to the Living</i>	<i>Primo contatto</i> (CA Nord)	First contact
<i>Nerves</i>	<i>Incidente nucleare</i> (Futuro Fanucci)	Nuclear incident
<i>The Wind Whales of Ishmael</i>	<i>Pianeta d'aria</i> (Futuro Fanucci)	Planet of air
<i>The Yellow Fraction</i>	<i>Il pianeta della solitudine</i> (Slan Libra)	The Planet of Solitude

The comparison between the original titles and their translations shows a wider structural and semantic variety in the English titles, which appear to be less dependent on the typical genre imagery. On the contrary, Italian translations show not only a tendency towards simple nominal structures but also a strong preference for the typical tropes of science fiction.

This adherence to classic science fictional imagery was particularly true of the Cosmo Argento series which, being also sold at newsagents', perhaps needed a clear generic identity to be immediately identified by passing or casual readers. On the other hand, the use of more "literary" titles was a characteristic of those series meant to be displayed in bookshops, such as the novels published by Libra and Fanucci. The "literariness" of these titles was expressed in different ways, for example through particular stylistic choices. In *Il lungo meriggio della Terra* [The long afternoon of Earth], published by Fanucci, the Italian title is a literal translation of the original *The Long Afternoon of Earth*, but the literary "meriggio" was chosen to translate "afternoon" instead of the standard "pomeriggio". In other cases, the "literariness" of these titles was expressed through a particular poetic image, as in *Pescatore di stelle* [Fisherman of Stars], chosen to translate the original title *Time is the Simplest Thing*, or through sophisticated cultural references such as the Luddite *Distrugete le macchine* [Destroy the machines], published by Nord, whose original title was *Piano Player*.

4.6 Re-imagining science fiction: the cover illustrations

Since the establishment of science fiction as an autonomous genre in the US in the 1920s, the visual illustrative material chosen to accompany the narratives has played an important role in developing the genre's iconographic nature and providing a visual anchoring to the verbal imagery (see Moody, 2007:43). The art work on science fiction covers of books and magazines particularly contributed to disseminate and establish this visual repertoire, as Ettore Capriolo had already pointed out in the early 1960s

Mostri e razzi, creature misteriose di mondi lontani e paesaggi apocalittici, automi antropomorfici ed esseri viventi dall'aspetto di macchine, insidie della natura e diabolici congegni escogitati dall'uomo: le *dramatis personae* dell'universo fantascientifico sono puntualmente riflesse nelle forme e nei colori delle copertine.¹⁰⁷ (Capriolo, 1963:99)

These subjects were typical of the gaudy covers of early science fiction, as originally published in pulp magazines such as *Amazing Stories* in the 1920, but similar art-covers also continued to appear later, when magazine science fiction was "re-packaged" in the 1950s for publication in paperback form (Moody, 2007:54). Italian science fiction initially followed this representational trend, as can be easily seen when looking at the covers of the magazines and book series that started in Italy from the 1950s onwards. This figurative debt has been admitted by the Italian illustrators themselves who, since they could not rely on an Italian tradition in this area¹⁰⁸, had to invent a "science fictional style" (see Carlo Jacono in Cozzi, 2006), which clearly was often inspired by their American counterparts.

¹⁰⁷ [Monsters and rockets, mysterious creatures from remote worlds and apocalyptic landscapes, anthropomorphic automatons/robots and living creatures looking like machines: the *dramatis personae* of the science fictional universe are reflected in the forms and colours of the covers.]

¹⁰⁸ It must be noted that some precedent existed in the area of comic books, where some Italian illustrators and writers had provided examples of science fiction art. The most famous of these works is *Saturno contro la Terra* created in 1936 by writer Cesare Zavattini and illustrated by Federico Pedrocchi.

Capriolo defines this imagery as a “koinè figurative” [figurative koinè] to indicate how in the US and elsewhere, including Italy, science fictional imagination created a well-known body of rather stereotypical images.

Il mostro sarà nella grande maggioranza dei casi un animale ripugnante (preferibilmente un insetto) convenientemente ingrandito; il razzo apparirà sempre e comunque come un'immagine di natura fondamentalmente fallica (...); l'essere dell'altro mondo s'apparerà al mostro o, in qualche caso, al robot; il paesaggio galassico ricorderà invariabilmente i Dalì e gli Ernst della pittura surrealista degli anni Trenta.¹⁰⁹ (Capriolo, 1963:99)

In the 1970s, however, this repertoire expanded to include new imagery chosen to represent the new science fiction of writers such as J. G. Ballard and Harlan Ellison. The illustrations became less flamboyant and acquired a more abstract, symbolic and metonymic character (Moody, 2007:53). The Italian mediators, however, did not necessarily follow the linear development of the illustration of science fiction in the US and Britain, but were free to select within this imaginative *koinè* in the same way that they selected authors and novels. At the same time, they could draw inspiration from the Italian or European artistic tradition and “domesticate” the imported narratives through familiar visual material. An example of the latter is the illustrative style adopted by Ugo Malaguti for the *Libra* covers. The illustrations he used for the book covers are all reproductions of paintings by Allison¹¹⁰, indicated on the back cover by the words, “tempera by Allison” [painting by Allison] - information whose importance especially relied on the fact that the illustration was a “work of art” and as such projecting a sort of “prestigious aura” on the whole publication (cf. Berger, 1972). This domesticating strategy was not followed by Nord and Fanucci, who relied on more typical science fiction imagery to represent their novels. The covers on the books published by Nord tend to be rather sober and “scientific”, with reproductions of astronomical objects and strange technology.

¹⁰⁹ [In most cases the monster will be a disgusting animal (preferably an insect), conveniently enlarged; a rocket will always be represented as something fundamentally phallic (...); the creature from another world will show common features with a monster or, sometimes, with a robot; the galactic landscape will invariably recall Dalì's and Ernst's 1930s surrealist paintings.]

¹¹⁰ Pseudonym adopted by artist Mariella Anderlini, wife of Ugo Malaguti, the editor and publisher of *Libra*. It is not clear whether these paintings were especially commissioned or Malaguti selected the most appropriate works from his wife's production, but Ernesto Vegetti reports that Malaguti started a series of public discussions about science fiction, known as “Incontri con la fantascienza” [Meetings with science fiction] during which he presented both his wife's paintings and *Libra*'s publications (Vegetti, 1983:3).

Fanucci, on the other hand, goes the opposite way, with colourful and dramatic cover art often more akin to the style of “fantasy” than science fiction.

4.7 Reading the covers of science fiction books

The analysis of selected paratextual elements has allowed me to identify specific patterns of presentation, regularities and differences in how the various mediators treated the elements they needed in order to express a particular image of science fiction. However, it can be assumed that such elements were not meant to be perceived separately, but had to provide an overall impression, a point of impact able to attract readers. Because they are a combination of visual and verbal elements, book covers can be considered as multimodal texts, relying as they do on both components to present information to the reader. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have argued in their study of multimodal texts, the way in which different modes of expression are arranged in a text, the colours used and different size of elements all create a language that readers can interpret on the basis of particular rules developed in western culture, and which people have internalized¹¹¹. Drawing on this theoretical model, I have tried to 'read' the covers, assuming that, as Moody and Matthews state, covers are “a key conduit through which negotiations take place between authors, the book trade and readers” (Matthew and Moody, 2007:xi), that is to say function as ‘thresholds of interpretation’ (Genette, 1997).

One of the striking elements of the science fiction books that I have analysed is their visibility as translations and particularly their being “traduzioni integrali” [unabridged translations]. Libra inserts the information unobtrusively within the blurb in the internal flap of the dust cover, highlighting it as part of the general strategy of the publisher: “...importanza dei testi presentati, l’eleganza della veste

¹¹¹Kress and van Leeuwen’s multimodal framework is based on of M.A.K. Halliday’s theory of social semiotics applied to the visual components of texts and it has been particularly used in the study of texts that combine different modes of expressions. According to this model, the location of elements in a text is part of a “visual grammar” that assigns a specific communicative value to elements on the basis of their position in the text, their colour, their salience and visibility. The “visual grammar” of Kress and van Leeuwen assigns specific ideological values to different areas of texts that contain both visual and verbal elements so, for example, elements placed on the right-left axis signify New and Given, respectively, and elements placed on a top/bottom axis correspond to the Ideal Vs Real dichotomy.

e la cura delle presentazioni e delle traduzioni” [...the importance of the chosen texts, the elegance of the cover and the attention given to the presentations and translations...]. Fanucci and Nord give even higher prominence and visibility to the novels as translations, placing the wording “edizione integrale” [unabridged edition] prominently on the front cover of the Nord’s series Cosmo Oro and Fanucci’s series Futuro, in a way that was visually distinct from the rest of the cover material. Nord presents the information with bold black letters within a red circle. Fanucci reports the same wording also in bold black letters within a yellow circle and repeats the information on the back cover.¹¹²

This feature is quite unusual in book publishing, as the practice of making translations visible is not widespread and it was even less common in the 1970s, either in traditional or popular literature. Consequently, it begs the question as to what the aim of this practice was, since most readers, even educated ones, do not usually have very clear ideas about translation strategies and normally assume that translations are faithful renderings of the original texts. The most plausible hypothesis is that this information had a phatic function and was used to establish a rapport with the readers. In actual fact, it is possible to assume that by the 1970s most regular science fiction readers knew that many translations published in the past were reduced and sometimes poorly rendered versions of the originals (see Chapter II), a practice that continued throughout the 1970s in popular series such as *Urania*.¹¹³ Consequently, the wording “edizione integrale” [unabridged edition], was not just an informative or promotional label but reached into the shared history of the SF community, and addressed issues that were at the core of the science fiction debate: its identity as a genre and how it should be produced and consumed. Translation represented an ideal terrain on which different ideas about science fiction could be examined and discussed. It is not surprising, then, that the wording “edizione integrale” was placed on the right and in the top half, as this is the position usually given to information that is perceived as new and challenging

¹¹² The cover images can be seen at: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?385019> (Nord) and at: <http://www.catalogovegetti.com/catalogo/E0204.htm#01846> (Fanucci)

¹¹³ *Urania*’s policy of cutting and reducing the novels has continued in recent times and it is still a matter of contention among publishers/editors and fans, as a recent and heated debate on *Urania web* blog shows: <http://blog.librimondadori.it/blogs/urania/2010/07/26/urania-1561-alla-fine-dellarcobaleno/>; (Last accessed on: 7/5/11).

For something to be New means that it is presented as something which is yet not known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something to which the viewer must pay special attention. Broadly speaking, the meaning of the New is therefore 'problematic', 'contestable', 'the information "at issue"'. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:181)

4.8 Translating science fiction as "literature"

The first publisher to change the way in which science fiction was published was the founder of Libra, Ugo Malaguti, with the series *Slan. Il meglio della fantascienza* and *I Classici della fantascienza*, started in 1968 and 1969, respectively.

Both series were visually very similar, with hardbound reddish covers and white jackets. Front covers featured stylized, "surrealist" illustrations, 'static' images; human figures rarely appeared and there was very little 'narrative' impact. The first impression given by these books was one of sophisticated publications and it is clear that the visual component was meant to encourage readers to associate the books with more authoritative literature. From the elegant, simple layout and quiet colours of the illustrations, to the unobtrusive fonts used for the title, author's name and the indication of the series, nothing could be visually more distant from the typical imagery associated with science fiction¹¹⁴. This literary connection is not casual and it is quite possible that the layout of these covers was based on the books published by Einaudi which, as I have discussed in Chapter III, not only had become a point of reference for the graphics of book publishing in general in Italy, but had obviously provided the model for the SF anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile*. In addition, as Giulia Iannuzzi has noted, the Einaudi model seems to have inspired the covers of the series published by La Tribuna, *Galassia* and *SFBC*, which presented abstract images on a white background (Iannuzzi, 2014a:178). Considering that Ugo Malaguti had been for a while an editor of *SFBC*, it is clear that he applied this model to the series that he founded.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the book cover for *City*, by Clifford Simak, published by Libra in 1970. At: <https://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/volumi/NILF101369/city/>

The tendency to produce poetic images expressed through an elegant language that I described earlier, when discussing the titles, is also evident in the visual choices for the covers. So, it is through particular stylistic choices that Ugo Malaguti, publisher, editor and translator of Libra, projected his idea of science fiction and it has to be wondered whether this stylistic tendency affected the books he chose to publish. Since the *Classics* are all retranslations of books previously published by *Urania*, whose original titles were mostly retained, it could be said that this preference for stylistic elegance was already present in the *Urania* translations. However, considering that by 1968 *Urania* had already published over four hundred titles, Malaguti had a wide repertoire of titles to choose from, and I would like to argue that his choices depended on the idea of science fiction he wanted to express. Malaguti played safe and did not attempt any particular innovations in relation to the canon of science fiction; his selection was always based on a list of well-known authors, already considered as classics of the genre, placed within the limit of the so called 1940s Golden Age of science fiction. This hypothesis is supported by the translations in the *Slan* series, which was supposed to present new, unpublished works. The books published in this series were not retranslations, yet the authors still belonged to the same small groups of classic writers featured in *I classici*.

Another observation that can be made is that there did not appear to be a particular correlation between the illustrations and the titles, or the contents of the books. Rather than serving to attract the reader with a mimetic image, the visual material, with its sophisticated yet repetitive style and imagery, reinforced the idea of science fiction as “art”, or “literature”.

As a matter of fact, it could be argued that in these series it was the visual component that mostly carried the message, since, following Kress and van Leeuwen’s model, it is in the top half of a multimodal text that we find a representation of the “ideal”, of “the promise of the product” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:186-7), that is to say, of what was to be desired. In this case, what was desirable was distancing science fiction from its “popular” past and directing it towards its reception as literature.

4.9 Translating science fiction as “science”

In the same way as Libra had done, the two series published by Nord, Cosmo Oro and Cosmo Argento, presented their narratives through paratextual material meant to project a more sophisticated image of science fiction, exemplified by the “precious” colours chosen for the hard cover editions, gold for Cosmo Oro and silver for Cosmo Argento. Both launched in the 1970s, the two series focused respectively on the publications of the classics of science fiction, including retranslations (Cosmo Oro), and new, unpublished works (Cosmo Argento). Like Libra, Nord focused mainly on well-known science fiction works, especially belonging to the subgenres of “hard-science fiction”¹¹⁵ and “sociological science fiction”¹¹⁶. It is therefore quite surprising to find, included in the classics, three novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, originally published between 1917 and 1919 with the titles of *A princess of Mars*, *The Gods of Mars* and *Warlords of Mars*, and usually associated with the pure escapism of pulp narratives (cf. James, 1994:46). Nord collects them in an omnibus volume entitled *John Carter di Marte* [John Carter from Mars], erasing the references to a possible fantastic content evoked by nouns such as “princess”, “gods” and “warlords” and reinforcing a pattern previously established by the second book in the series, *Aarn Munro il gioviano* [Aarn Munro from Jove] and also perhaps metonymically associated to the title of the first book: *Cittadino della galassia*, a literal translation of Robert E. Heinlein’s *Citizen of the Galaxy*. The neat separation between science fiction and fantasy had, in any case, already been established by Nord which, unlike the other two publishers, had a specific series, *Fantacollana*, for the novels labelled as “fantasy” or containing fantastic elements. However, the distinction between “fantasy” and “science fiction” is notoriously difficult, and *Fantacollana* too contained a few books whose generic nature was not so clear. Titles were also not

¹¹⁵ “Hard SF” is the term used to define science fiction that is particularly focused on scientific extrapolation and technology, or, as Samuelson put it “getting the science right” and not contradicting the “contemporary state of scientific knowledge” (Samuelson, 2009:494). It is considered by some as the most representative type of SF and is usually identified with the type of stories published in the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* during John Campbell’s editorship in the 1940s.

¹¹⁶ “Sociological” or “social science fiction” refers to SF narratives that started to be published in the 1950s and deal with the social problems of the time, extrapolated in the future, such as the effect of overpopulation, environmental disasters and social conflicts. (Giovannini and Minicangeli, 1998:22-24; see also Chapter I, Sec 1.4)

always a well-defined indication of content and genre and, as I have previously indicated, the Italian tendency to reinforce the titles' literary quality did not help.

It was especially through contrasting visual strategies that generic difference was affirmed, with *Fantacollana* characterised by colourful, lush images and typical “fantasy” subjects, while the two science fictional series had more sober covers with a simple layout. In *Cosmo Oro* and *Cosmo Argento*, both the title and the illustration were “contained” within centrally positioned frameworks, which produced a rather symmetrical effect. However, the position of the title in the top half and its bold lettering could be regarded as the element that would be naturally prioritized and functioning as the main conveyer of the book’s generic identity and content. The fact that the cover art was not always credited may also be an indication that the visual component was perceived as less important.

The covers of *Cosmo Oro* and *Cosmo Argento* were a visual reflection and reinforcement of the “classic” science fiction published by Nord, with illustrations that more often than not had no clear link either with the title or the story. The images mostly had a “scientific” quality, with astronomical objects such as moons and planets, that sometimes were reproductions of works by “artisti spaziali” (Pizzo, 1978:15) like Luciana Tom Matalon and Antonio Cazzamali.

As in the case of *Libra*, the covers had a certain representational repetitiveness, perhaps relying on a central exemplary type of image to impress the main idea. Some of the illustrations had the neatness of photographs, which blurred the borders between fiction and reality. This is the case, for example, for the image used for *Furia* (1972), the translation of *Fury* (1947), by Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore, which is very similar to a real astronomical photograph.¹¹⁷

Particularly representative is the case of the illustration used for *Dune* (1965) by Frank Herbert, published in *Cosmo Oro* in 1973. *Dune* is a desert planet, an extremely dangerous place because of its sand storms and monstrous creatures,

¹¹⁷ See the cover image of *Furia* at: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?1429922> and compare this with the illustration of the moon in the website *Nineplanets* <http://nineplanets.org/luna.html>. (Last accessed: 29/01/19).

called the “sandworms”. As Adam Roberts points out, the *Dune* world is characterised equally by familiar representations of desert civilization and disturbing depictions of alien beings:

It is the sandworms that dominate *Dune*. They are the most potent and the most memorable of Herbert’s inventions in the novel, the things readers carry away with them. (...) The worms are utterly different from us, or from anything we know; and that they are located in a world that is familiar enough from cultural representations of medieval Arabia only serves to highlight the beautiful strangeness of the beasts. (Roberts, 2000:45)

This alien quality was well highlighted in the original art cover of the first English edition of *Dune* (1965) by illustrator John Schoenherr. In the Italian edition (1973) however, another image was chosen, the one that Schoenherr produced for the paperback edition in 1967, a more conventional representation of a desert landscape with traditional black-clad desert dwellers moving against what appears to be a background of sand dunes and mountains¹¹⁸. In conclusion, the visual material used for the cover domesticated the alien quality of *Dune*, presenting it through familiar desert imagery.

Interestingly, the sister series *Cosmo Argento* initially proposed more varied and dramatic visual material, with illustrations that seem to establish some link with the story, as for example in the first book of the series *La civiltà dei solari* [The civilization of the Solarians] with its image of strange beings and rockets on the cover. This was perhaps due to the fact that the novels published in this series were mostly from little-known authors and the visual material may have been seen as a way of attracting the readers and reinforce generic identity. However, after a few books, the same illustrations of astronomical objects typical of *Cosmo Oro* also appeared on the covers of *Cosmo Argento*.

¹¹⁸ See the cover art for the first edition of *Dune* at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dune-Frank_Herbert_\(1965\)_First_edition.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dune-Frank_Herbert_(1965)_First_edition.jpg). The cover art for the English paperback edition and the Italian edition is available at: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?1782866>. (Last accessed: 29/01/19).

4.10 Translating science fiction as “fantasy”

Fanucci started its two main series, *Futuro* and *Orizzonti* in 1973, i.e. a few years later than Libra and Nord, and it followed the other two publishers by launching science fiction books that differed from the typical paperback publications available at newsagents'. The books were not hardbound, but their format was larger than those published by Nord and Libra, and the overall impression was of publications that aspired to be more refined than the average paperback. This was confirmed by the substantial critical apparatus – each book had an introductory essay linked to the theme of the novel – and the price was in the same higher range that characterised Nord and Libra.¹¹⁹

Fanucci's general policy was that of blurring the borders between science fiction and fantasy, including in the catalogue many works closer to the genres of fantasy and horror as Sebastiano Fusco, one of the editors, himself stated (Fusco, 2002:90). Fusco, together with the other editor, Gianfranco De Turrís, also extended the time range within which Nord and Libra had selected the works to be published, including minor authors from the 19th century belonging to the canon of English literature. Although the books were presented as science fiction through the name of the series: *Biblioteca di fantascienza* [Library of science fiction] and *Orizzonti: Capolavori di fantascienza* [Horizons: Masterpieces of science fiction], their catalogues included several works whose “science fictional” nature could be a matter of contention and that are generally seen as being closer to the genres of “fantasy” and “horror”, such as the works by H.P. Lovecraft¹²⁰ and books like *The King in Yellow* (1895) by Robert W. Chambers and *The Boats of the Glen Carrig* (1907) by William H. Hodgson.

¹¹⁹ The price is a good indication of the positioning of books in the market. In 1973, when Fanucci published the first two novels of the series, their cost was 2,700 (*Orizzonti*) and 2,400 (*Futuro*) liras, respectively. *Dune*, published in the same year by Nord, was 3,500 liras while books by Libra were over 3,000 liras. In comparison, the prices of science fiction paperbacks were much lower: in 1973 a book published in the *Urania* series was 350 liras while a few years later *La lampada del sesso* by Brian Aldiss, published by Rizzoli in its paperback series BUR, was 1,500 liras.

¹²⁰ It may be noted that the editors of the Fanucci series, Sebastiano Fusco and Gianfranco De Turrís, are themselves specialists of H.P. Lovecraft, about whose work they wrote a number of essays.

By including these writers, they not only blurred the borders between genres and extended the perceived time range of science fiction, but also aligned established science fiction writers such as Clifford Simak or Brian Aldiss with writers belonging to the canon of English literature such as Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen¹²¹. It may be observed that, like Libra, Fanucci also tried to “ennoble” science fiction, by moving it closer to traditional literature. However, while Libra attempted to achieve this goal by making science fiction books look like typical literary novels, Fanucci went the opposite way and brought authors and works normally included in English literature within the colourful field of science fiction. The impression is that Fanucci were less certain about the visual identity of the books, as the covers of the Futuro series were changed after the first five books.

After a somewhat sober beginning - with a central illustration on a light blue background – the covers were changed into “busy” visual material with striking and dramatic illustrations, and the use of primary colours such as black, red and yellow. The top half was divided into two sections of different colours, red and black, which contained the name of the author and the title and the indication of the series. The bottom half was totally taken by the illustrations, which were of the “narrative” type, as shown for example by the image chosen for Algis Budrys’ apocalyptic tale *Testimoni dell’uomo* (1975): the Statue of Liberty shattered on the foreground, and in the background a city within a vortex of fire. Often there was a more transparent link between title and illustration, like for the books by Anne Caffrey *Dragonflight* (1969) = *Volo di drago* (1975) [The flight of the dragon] and *Dragonquest* (1971) = *La cerca del drago* (1978) [The quest of the dragon], all featuring images of dragons on the cover¹²². The visual component seems to have been of paramount importance also in the *Orizzonti* series. The books in this series were characterised by a wrap-around dust jacket, which was entirely taken up by the illustration. There were no special sections on the cover for the title and the name of the author, which were just placed on the illustration itself in bold yellow letters, in the top half. An attempt to change the cover was made between 1976 and 1977, with the title and

¹²¹ The canonical status of both authors may be indicated by the fact that they are included in the 1985 edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Margaret Drabble.

¹²² The cover art for *Testimoni dell’uomo* and *Volo di drago* in the Fanucci series can be seen respectively at: <https://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/opere/NILF1014816/testimoni-dell-uomo/> and at: <http://www.uraniamania.com/index.php> (Last accessed: 29/01/19).

the name of the author placed within a box in the top half but this design was abandoned after five books and the old pattern returned. The importance given to the visual can also be gauged by the fact that Fanucci employed several illustrators for the covers. Initially these were mainly Italian artists, but later well-known international artists, such as Karel Thole, Tim White and Eddie Jones, were also employed.

4.11 Conclusions

The analysis I presented in this chapter may be summarised in two main points. First, the publishers whose series I have analysed presented science fiction books as clearly mediated objects. The “presence” of translators, editors, or publishers was explicitly declared by various means, in different parts of the texts: on the cover by way of blurbs, in the conventional information provided in the internal pages, by way of “Introductions”, “Forewords”, “Afterwords” and even comments on the translations. This presence may have had several functions. On the one hand, by presenting science fiction through the ‘packaging’ conventions typical of traditional literature, the status of the genre was raised. On the other hand, these same conventions created a sort of hiatus between the reader and the text, who could not consume it directly but had to negotiate the distance created by paratextual elements, such as introductory critical essays, author’s bibliography, etc. This distance was further highlighted by the visual strategies adopted to represent the books, that often suggested a connection with art and invested the books with its cultural authority.

Secondly, the differences illustrated in relation to the way in which these three publishers represented science fiction were undoubtedly due in part to commercial factors, the need to differentiate their products and obtain visibility in the market. However, they also reflected the views of the agents of mediation involved in the creation of these series. These editors, publishers and translators, as frequently happens in science fiction, were all passionate supporters of the genre and believed in the positive impact that science fiction could have on the culture of the country.

CHAPTER V
SCIENCE FICTION AS COUNTER-CULTURE.
THE CASE OF SF MAGAZINES *ROBOT* AND *UN'AMBIGUA UTOPIA*

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show how the renewal of science fiction that characterised the development of the genre in the 1970s was not limited to aesthetic and paratextual elements aimed at raising the cultural status of the genre (Chapter IV). An important aspect of science fiction in this decade was also the way in which wider social and political issues of the time were expressed at various levels in the critical and narrative SF texts that made their appearance in that period. For instance, the harsh political polarisation that characterised Italian life and society in the 1970s was to be found also in some science fiction periodicals which, as I will illustrate below, positioned themselves explicitly in relation to politics. This engagement with politics seems to have been peculiar to the Italian scenario. As Davies points out, a political dimension can be easily identified in science fiction

in dealing with a subject matter that confronts the problems of technological and social change, which poses the possibility of alternatives (...), the literature regularly deals with political questions, directly or tangentially (Davies, 1990:5)

However, for a long time such potential was rejected by many editors, writers and readers, as they perceived SF as an 'innocent' genre, which should not contain any 'disturbing' matter - be it sex, religion or politics. Equally controversial was the explicit political commitment of its writers, readers and editors. The few instances recorded by the histories of science fiction mention the 'outrage' that such commitment caused in the SF community. The Futurians for example, a left-wing SF group formed in 1938 in the US out of The Committee for the Political Advancement of Science Fiction (Luckhurst, 2005:67), were excluded from the *First World Science Fiction Convention* (1939) because of their explicit political involvement (James, 1994:64).

The belief that science fiction should not deal with 'sensitive' issues was not confined to the United States. In Italy the most commercial publications, like the popular book series *Urania*, stayed clear of these aspects. Content deemed not suitable for its readership, such as religion (Cozzi, 2006:241-41) or sex (Iannuzzi, 2014a:36), was censored. While some 'daring' texts found their way in Italian publications in the 1960s, it was especially in the following decade that book series and magazines became willing to publish works dealing with potentially controversial material. In this chapter I will focus on two of these publications, the SF magazines *Robot* and *Un'Ambigua Utopia* (UAU) that not only presented themselves as explicitly political, but expressed in their pages values and beliefs that were part of the Italian counterculture at the time. In my analysis, I will especially examine the connection between science fiction and politics as expressed in these two periodicals, focusing on how such connection found its way into the translations published by *Robot*. In fact, it is important to point out that while *UAU* was a real counter-cultural magazine, an expression of the current youth protest movement (Caronia:2009:3-5), *Robot* was born as a proper science fiction magazine and did not have, at least in the very first issues, strong political elements, although it was clearly interested in the most innovative and progressive elements of SF. It would only be later, possibly also because of the influence of *UAU*, that *Robot* would become more explicit on the topic of science fiction and politics. How did such increased politicisation affect the content of the magazine? Since *Robot*, like most Italian SF magazines before, mainly published translations from English, the key question is to what extent these translations reflected *Robot's* increased political positioning.

The answer to this question will be the main focus of this chapter, however before dealing with it I will look at some of the political and cultural features that characterised the decade, to briefly contextualise my discussion of *Robot* and *UAU*. This will be followed by a description of the main features of *Un'ambigua Utopia*, as this magazine represents an important point of reference to understand *Robot's* political substrate. The rest of the chapter is structured around the analysis of *Robot* in relation to its discourses, as expressed through its critical pieces, its feature articles and, especially, its translations.

5.2 The 1970s: years of hope and despair

The 1970s, which have become known as “gli anni di piombo” [the years of lead]¹²³ to refer to the general climate of social and political unrest and the acts of terrorism that became the hallmarks of the decade, still constitute a problem in terms of historical analysis. Although the events of those years have been the subject of a number of studies of different kinds, there seems to be a widespread perception that the period is still “unfinished business”, as many commentators talk of “fare i conti con gli anni Settanta” (for example Paolin, 2006:21) indicating that Italians are still unable to come to terms with those times. This inability to make peace with the 1970s has been seen as the sign of a “traumatic” experience, which would also explain the relative lack of literature about terrorism (Glynn, 2006).

As many commentators have pointed out, acts of political violence between 1975 and the early 1980s increased. The two defining events of the period were the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, leader of the Christian Democrats, by the Red Brigades in 1978, and the explosion of a bomb in Bologna railway station in 1980. Those times, furthermore, saw frequent clashes between the police and protesters in demonstrations, or groups of extremists of different political affiliations.

The constant violence has led some commentators to define the events of the decade as a “Guerra civile a bassa intensità” [Low intensity civil war] and has so much dominated the 1970s as a decade that the identity of that time has come to be perceived only in terms of its violence (see Vitello, 2013).

While acts of political violence represented the most glaring element of the times, the decade was also characterised by social progress, when groups that had previously been marginalised were finally able to express their voice and promote important social changes (Cento Bull and Giorgio, 2006). A significant example of this progress was the growth of the feminist movement and the social reforms

¹²³ The actual term comes from the Italian translation of a film about left-wing terrorism by German director Margarethe Von Trotta, *Die Bleierne Zeit* (1981).

made possible by their campaign, such as the right to divorce and abortion. In addition, according to Echaurren and Salaris, the women's movement was influential in a more general way, promoting a way of doing politics centred on the 'personal' and on the importance of individual needs and relationships (Echaurren and Salaris, 1999:159). Social movements, rather than traditional political groupings, became the subjects of collective actions in the second half of the 1970s with programmes that stressed existential and social objectives. For example, the "Circoli del proletariato giovanile", born in 1975, had as a general programme "riappropriarsi della vita, superare la famiglia, far politica in modo diverso, esprimere i propri bisogni, edonismo di massa" [take one's life back, go beyond the family, do politics in a different way, express one's needs, mass hedonism] (*Ibid.*).

Particularly notable was the so-called "Movimento del Settantasette" [Movement of 1977], a social movement mainly formed by students and young people who defined themselves as "indiani metropolitani" [metropolitan Indians], to mark their feeling of marginalisation and alienation from society. By using the image of the "Indian" as portrayed in popular narratives of the American West, associated with a word evoking urban landscapes, they effectively expressed an idea of difference. This 'self-definition' also signalled the importance of language for this group, whose witty slogans and creative expressions became well known in those years; as Robert Lumley has highlighted, "In the language of the movement itself, the identity associated with deviance and marginality was claimed and appropriated by its participants" (Lumley, 1990:296).

Thus, it would be more correct to see the 1970s as a time of contradictions, caught between the move towards building a better society promoted by different social forces and groups who used extreme means to either accelerate or block this progress.

5.2.1 The literary representation of the 'years of lead'

One of the elements that has recently drawn researchers' attention is the way in which the literature produced during the 'years of lead' responded to the contradictions of the period, particularly to the representation of political violence.

It has been noted that relatively few novels published in the 1970s dealt with the social and political situation of the time, in contrast with a copious production of non-narrative texts about that same period.

Recent studies by Conte (2013) and Paolin (2006) deal with this topic, but they seem to disagree in relation to when novels dealing with terrorism appeared. Demetrio Paolin's study only considers works published from the year 2000 onwards, as according to him Italian novels only started really confronting the 'years of lead' from 2003 (Paolin, 2006: 21). Conversely, Ermanno Conte (2013) states that literary works dealing with terrorism appeared since the early 1970s, for instance *La paloma* (1972) by Carlo Castellaneta, whose plot revolves around the explosion of a bomb in Milan's Piazza Fontana on 12 December 1969, Natalia Ginzburg's *Caro Michele* (1973) focusing on left-wing terrorism, and *Occidente* (1975) by Ferdinando Camon dealing with right-wing terrorism. I tend to agree with Conte on this topic since - while it is true that there were not many literary works engaging with the topic of political violence during the 1970s - Paolin's position seems too extreme. While he admits that he did not intend to produce a comprehensive study of all Italian works dealing with 1970s terrorism, but wanted to focus on the publishing phenomenon of the novels about this topic after 2003, his question "Cosa ha rotto, dopo trent'anni, la consegna del silenzio" [What has broken the rule of silence after thirty years] (Paolin, 2006:25) implies that there was nothing beforehand.

It is also interesting to note that the scarcity of literary works was compensated by popular cinema, with several Italian films released in the 1970s on the theme of political violence. As Christian Uva has recently argued, the climate and violence of those years were mainly represented in "genre" films, especially the so-called 'poliziottesco'¹²⁴ or 'poliziesco all'italiana'

¹²⁴ As Uva explains 'poliziottesco' was a disparaging term used by critics to define films that Uva sees as the Italian versions of gangster movies, such as *La polizia ringrazia* (Stefano Vanzina, 1972), *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* (Sergio Martino, 1973).

Le trame eversive, i servizi segreti deviati, il terrorismo, cominciano a nutrire i nuclei drammaturgici di pellicole che, pur sfruttando tali elementi ai fini di uno spettacolo di “consumo”, a distanza di tempo si fanno rivalutare quali rappresentativi, a volte persino “coraggiosi”, sguardi su quegli anni.¹²⁵ (Uva, 2007:23)

By contrast, “authors” seemed to be more restrained and cautious in approaching such matters (*Ibid*). The scenario emerging from the above-mentioned studies indicates that notwithstanding an interest to represent political violence in fiction (either in print or on screen), there was also a tendency to deal with it in an oblique, indirect way or through the ‘safe’ structure of genre¹²⁶. Gabriele Vitello, for instance, notes how the novels about terrorism in the 1970s had a tendency to depict it in metaphorical terms, “ovvero a rappresentarlo in modi allusivi e simbolici piuttosto che realistici” (Vitello, 2010-11:9) [that is to say, by representing it in an indirect and symbolic way, rather than in a realistic way]. These indirect modes of expressions also allowed a degree of distance, a less direct engagement with the events they were dealing with. Distance is a way of facing the ‘unspeakable’ and it has been employed by writers in other contexts characterised by political violence, such as Northern Ireland novelists writing about the ‘Troubles’ relocating their narratives elsewhere (Cf. Patten, 1995:135). These two factors justify an exploration of the translation of science fiction as an oblique form of writing that allowed the exploration of difficult matters, particularly in a politicised magazine like *Robot*.

5.3 Politics and science fiction: the magazines *Robot* and *Un’ambigua Utopia*

The two magazines that I will describe and analyse in the following sections emerge in this climate. The first one, *Robot*, was created with the aim of launching “una vera rivista di fantascienza” [a real science fiction magazine] (Curtoni, 1999:57) which, as the editor Vittorio Curtoni states in his first editorial, would

¹²⁵ [Conspiracy plots, corrupted secret services and terrorism start to feed the dramaturgical nuclei of films which invite a re-assessment as, while exploiting these elements for popular consumption, they were also emblematic, and sometimes even “courageous”, in expressing views on those years]

¹²⁶ Interestingly, according to Conte, genre fiction in the form of crime stories and spy-stories would be chosen by a number of writers dealing with the ‘Years of Lead’ in the 1980s (Conte, 2013:9).

contain not only narratives but an informative section aimed at raising the debate about science fiction. The second one, *Un'ambigua Utopia (UAU)*, was a fanzine produced by a group of left-wing political activists with an interest in science fiction, and had strong links with the 1977 movement as its editor, Antonio Caronia, later highlighted (Caronia and Spagnul, 2009:7-8). Both magazines also had a political connotation, but while *UAU*'s identity as a counter-cultural product was clear, *Robot* was more ambiguous and contradictory. My aim in examining these magazines is to see to what extent the political and counter-cultural component intertwined with science fiction and especially how it was reflected in the translations. Since *UAU* did not publish translations, the main focus of this chapter will be on the translations published in *Robot*, while *UAU* will be useful as a point of reference, to assess the differences and similarities between the two titles.

Recent commentators have noted a common ground between the two magazines, showing the critical potential of science fiction within the left-wing cultural scene; for example, the literary collective Wu Ming stated:

Tra gli scopi della rivista [Robot] vi era abbattere lo steccato tra *science-fiction* e cultura di sinistra, impresa cui si dedicavano diversi gruppi, tra cui il collettivo *Un'ambigua utopia*.¹²⁷ (Wu Ming, 2003:8)

5.3.1 *Un'ambigua utopia*: general features

Un'ambigua utopia was born in December 1977 as a fanzine, i.e. a non-professional magazine, created by a group of left-wing political militants. The first nucleus of the collective included Giancarlo Bulgarelli, Gerardo Frizzanti, Danilo Marzorati, and Giuliano Spagnul.

They were later joined by Antonio Caronia and the fanzine changed direction. The collective took its name from Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed. An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974), which was translated in Italian as *I reietti dell'altro*

¹²⁷ [Among the aims of the magazine there was that of tearing down the barrier between *science fiction* and left-wing culture, an endeavour attempted by a number of groups, including the collective *Un'ambigua Utopia*.]

pianeta. Un'ambigua utopia (1976). The story of how the collective came to be has been reconstructed by some of its former members, by way of articles published as part of two volumes reproducing the nine issues of the magazine¹²⁸.

Their particular combination of politics and science fiction, as well as their links with the “Movimento del '77”, is also highlighted by their choice of a representative symbol of difference, like the “Martian”. The homophonic closeness with the word “Marxian” allowed them to create the adjective “Marx/z/iano”, whose creative and playful connotation is typical of the language strategies used by the 1977 Movement.

The nine issues of *UAU* were published at irregular intervals between 1977 and 1982, first on a mimeograph and later on a proper printing press. While the fanzine's sales were always low, the activities of the collective brought them a certain degree of notoriety and influence among young left-wing militants, with the creation of similar collectives in other cities¹²⁹. Debates and other events characterized by a ‘countercultural’ element were also organized by the collective and one drew the attention of the national press. Between 15 and 18 September 1978, the collective organised an event called “Invasione dei mar/x/ziani” which took place in Milan, with people dressed up as ‘aliens’. The event had the aim of “immettere il fantastico nel quotidiano, dichiarare l'occupazione del pianeta, risvegliare il “marziano” che c'è in te”¹³⁰. The modes of the event highlighted the closeness of the collective to the spirit of the “Movimento del '77”, with its irony and playful elements and its stress on “fantasy”.

The clear political positioning of *UAU* as well as their polemical tone and initiatives aimed at disrupting science fiction events did not make them very popular with some Italian critics. Ernesto Vegetti dismisses them in his contribution to a history of Italian fandom, stating how for them “la fantascienza era una mera scusa”

¹²⁸ The articles, written by Antonio Caronia, Piero Fiorili and Giuliano Spagnul, have been collected under the title “Per una storia di Un'Ambigua Utopia”, as an Appendix to the two collected volumes of the issues of *Un'Ambigua Utopia* (2009).

¹²⁹ For example, the collective “Pianeta rosso” in Naples.

¹³⁰ [Injecting fantasy in daily life, declaring the occupation of the planet, awakening the “martian” in you.]

(Vegetti, 2002:146), by which he implied that for them science fiction was just an opportunity to engage in politics. Carlo Pagetti begs to differ and, commenting on UAU's critical guide to science fiction published by Feltrinelli, notes how the group's "interesting approach to the sociological and cultural background of contemporary SF in Italy is linked to a clear understanding of the cognitive potentialities of the genre" (Pagetti, 1981).

Unlike *Robot*, for UAU politics came first and science fiction second. As Antonio Caronia explains in an introductory article to the recently-republished collection of the nine issues of *Un'Ambigua Utopia*, for UAU science fiction was purely instrumental, a type of narrative particularly suitable to deal with the problems of advanced industrial societies. In particular, he states how

Con la fantascienza non pensavamo di evadere dalla prigione, ma di distruggere quella prigione, o per meglio dire, di avere uno strumento in più per farlo.¹³¹ (Caronia, 2009:9)

Science fiction was perceived as a tool to question 'reality', to even breaking it through its capacity to undermine the concept itself of "reality"

La fantascienza minava – a volte apertamente scardinava – la nozione più ristretta di "realtà", metteva in dubbio che la realtà potesse identificarsi con l'esistente, reintroduceva a vele spiegate il *possibile* come irrinunciabile elemento costitutivo del *reale*.¹³² (Caronia, 2009:10)

This instrumental view of science fiction marks one of the main differences between UAU and *Robot*, as Caronia himself highlights when he admits UAU's members' lack of understanding for the kind of passionate love for the genre shown, for example, by someone like Vittorio Curtoni, the editor of *Robot*, who, when the magazine ceased publication, expressed anger at the readers who had not sufficiently supported it. (Caronia and Spagnul, 2009:9)

¹³¹ [We did not think that we would use science fiction to escape from prison, we thought we would destroy the prison with science fiction, or, in other words, we would have one more tool to do it.]

¹³² [science fiction undermined – sometimes it openly unhinged – the narrow notion of "reality", it questioned the fact that reality could be the same as what exists, it reintroduced in full sail the *possibile* as a fundamental and integral element of the *real*.]

In spite of these differences, the first issue of the fanzine highlights the connection with *Robot*. In an unsigned article, presumably from *UAU*'s editorial staff, the SF book series and magazines published in Italy at the time of the release of *UAU*'s first issue are listed and evaluated. *Robot* stands out as “un’iniziativa giovane e molto interessante, da seguire senz’altro con curiosità ed assiduità” [a very interesting and fresh initiative, to be followed with assiduity and interest] and the magazine is singled out as the one periodical that *UAU* intends to support (*UAU*, 1978:13)

Per quanto riguarda il nostro lavoro, intendiamo appoggiare apertamente le iniziative che “aprono” al dibattito e quindi siamo “sostenitori” di quelle riviste che lo accettano e lo sostengono. In particolare *Robot*, ma anche, in tono minore, *Nova SF*.¹³³ (*UAU*, 1978:13)

In addition, the issue includes an article about the science fiction market in the US by Vittorio Curtoni, also featuring in the second issue with another article entitled “sf: editori & politica in Italia” [sf: publishers & politics in Italy], where he states the need for a clearer positioning on the issue of politics on the part of publishers of science fiction, particularly when science fiction can be interpreted as an expression of right-wing politics. This statement is interesting, because Curtoni is very explicit about the ‘cautionary’ role that publishers should play in relation to right-wing science fiction, something that he had already stated in *Robot* but in less explicit terms

Io sono per il pluralismo delle idee, non mi piace la censura. Ma quello che conta, quello che importa, è presentare il prodotto di destra per ciò che è, avvertire il pubblico, metterlo sul chi vive; altrimenti ci si sputtana nel più atroce dei compromessi.¹³⁴ (Curtoni, *UAU* 2, April 1978:15)

In addition, he briefly reviews from a political point of view the history of science fiction in Italy, defining each publisher in terms of their, [he claims] usually absent,

¹³³ [As regards our work, we want to openly support the initiatives that “encourage” debate, so we are “supporters” of those magazines that accept and support it. *Robot* in particular but also, in a minor way, *Nova SF*.]

¹³⁴ [I am in favour of pluralism, I don't like censorship. But what counts, what is important is to present the right-wing work for what it is, warning the public, alerting it; otherwise one disgraces oneself in the most atrocious compromise.]

political commitment. For example, he notes how, in the 1950s, *Urania* “spadroneggiava all’insegna del più assoluto disimpegno politico “[ruled the roost showing the most absolute political disengagement] (*Ibid.*), a situation that, according to him, further deteriorated with the science fiction boom in the early 1970s when publishers and agencies with more financial possibilities and commercial goals entered the field. He thus lambasts publisher Nord for its “qualunquismo”¹³⁵, a term that in the context of the 1970s is almost as bad as “fascist”. Sebastiano Fusco and Gianfranco De Turrís, the editors of the Fanucci SF book series, are also criticised by Curtoni as their “fede fascista non potrebbe essere messa in dubbio da nessuno” [fascist beliefs cannot be questioned by anybody] (*Ibid.*). Equally bad are publishers such as Mondadori and others, because “una loro linea politica, semplicemente, non esiste” [a political line that is their own simply doesn’t exist] (*Ibid.*). Especially significant are his words about the creation of *Robot*, which he apparently conceived from the very beginning as a place from which ‘revolutionary science fiction’ could be launched

Nel 1976, quando diedi vita a ROBOT, la visualizzavo già come una tribuna da cui il carattere rivoluzionario di una certa ala della science-fiction potesse prendere il volo.¹³⁶ (Curtoni, UAU 2, April 1978:16)

However, as I will discuss later, there is no mention of this in the first issues of *Robot*, so it seems that the ‘politicisation’ of *Robot* was a more gradual development, perhaps even an effect of Curtoni’s contact with the members of UAU. As a matter of fact, Curtoni mentions in his editorial for *Robot* 24, March 1978, how his ideas about science fiction and democracy were developed through his discussions with other comrades with similar ideas, such as the collective *Un’Ambigua Utopia* (Curtoni, March 1978).

¹³⁵ The term “Qualunquismo” derives from a movement popular in the 1940s that was against political parties and the central government, setting itself as a defender of “L’uomo qualunque” [The Common Man]. Later, it came to have a strong pejorative connotation, someone who was perceived as a “cynic, a potential Fascist” (Ginsborg, 1990:100).

¹³⁶ [In 1976, when I gave life to ROBOT, I already visualized it as a platform from which the revolutionary character of a certain section of science fiction could take off.]

5.3.2 *Un'ambigua Utopia* on the translation of science fiction

The magazine UAU, as a rule, did not publish translated fiction. Only a few short stories written by Italian authors appeared throughout the nine issues, and no translations. However, the book review section sometimes contained references to translations, and translation was mentioned in some critical articles. As will be the case with *Robot*, the members of UAU were aware of the power of translation to change the quality of a book. Remo Guerrini, in an article about the economic factors of publishing science fiction published in UAU of March-April 1979, states how translations “se ben fatte possono rendere gradevole un brutto originale, e se mal fatte possono avvilitare un capolavoro” [when well-made they can make a bad original pleasant, and when badly made they can debase a masterpiece] (Guerrini, 1979:45).

More specific references to the quality of translation appeared in the article about Italian SF magazines and book series quoted above. In this article, there are references to the translation policy adopted by *Urania* and *I romanzi del cosmo*. As described in Chapter II, while *I romanzi del cosmo* was a poor relation of *Urania*, their strategy of cuts and heavy translational intervention was rather similar. In the article, strong words are used to describe these practices. With reference to *I romanzi del cosmo*, the author talks of “romanzi massacrati dalle traduzioni” [novels mangled by translations] (Anon, 1977:14), while the translated texts published in *Urania* are described as “pesantemente contraffatti rispetto al testo originale” [heavily counterfeited in relation to the original text] (UAU 1, December 1977:13). The use of the term “contraffatto” is particularly interesting, as it conveys an image of translation as a ‘forgery’ of the original since the word “contraffatto” frequently collocates with words such as “denaro” [money] and “documenti” [documents] to refer to fake money and fake documents.

5.4 The magazine *Robot*: general features

Published by Armenia and mostly edited by Vittorio Curtoni, *Robot* drew immediate attention for its elements of novelty and its energetic and charismatic editorship. Widely considered by both fans and critics as the best Italian SF magazine ever

published¹³⁷ *Robot* has, with time, acquired a cult status. It also merited an entry in the *Dizionario della letteratura Italiana del Novecento* edited by Alberto Asor Rosa, which includes it among “le riviste di fantascienza più complete apparse in Italia” [the most complete SF magazines that appeared in Italy] (Di Mattia, 1992: 468), while Giachini considers it “un segno miliare nella storia della fantascienza italiana” [a landmark in the history of Italian science fiction] (Giachini, 2002:98).

In spite of this critical acclaim, little has been written about *Robot*. One of the first texts was the story of how *Robot* came into existence and subsequently ceased to be, told by Vittorio Curtoni himself, with an aptly titled series of essays:¹³⁸ “L’epopea di *Robot*” [*Robot’s* epic tale]. There followed an essay by Giancarlo Giachino (2002), limited to a description of its main sections, and the elements of novelty represented by *Robot* and, recently, Giulia Iannuzzi’s more substantial and rigorously researched chapter about *Robot* in her study of Italian science fiction (Iannuzzi, 2014a: 281-324). However, even Iannuzzi, while briefly dealing with the question of the type of stories published by *Robot*, says very little about the actual translations. In this and the following sections, I will deal with this gap in the literature about *Robot* by examining selected material and the translations themselves, with the aim of clarifying how they contributed to the creation of *Robot’s* identity.

The first issue of *Robot* appeared in April 1976. The magazine’s iconic name “*Robot*” and the subtitle “Rivista di fantascienza” immediately identified its generic nature. *Robot’s* visual identity offered elements of continuity with previous publications, but there were also differences emphasising the magazine’s original features. The small format and the cover, with its white background, indicated that *Robot* was modelled on existing magazines/book series such as *Galassia* (of which Curtoni had been one of the editors) and *Galaxy* (the Italian edition of the homonymous American magazine). The titles of the narrative material and the non-fictional contributions were listed in a column on the left side of the front cover,

¹³⁷ Pizzo, for example, describes *Robot* as the most complete and beloved Italian publication of all times and the only one that published short stories, articles, essays, reviews, columns, letters (Pizzo, 2010:7).

¹³⁸ The essays appeared in *Retrofuturo* (1999), a collection of short stories authored by Vittorio Curtoni.

while the right side showed an image that took three quarters of the space and tended to represent figurative elements. An interest in the visual elements was evident also in the internal pages, with stories often accompanied by illustrations and photographs used with the non-narrative material (see also Iannuzzi, 2014a:284).

Both Giachini and Iannuzzi noted how *Robot's* paratextual elements evoked an idea of science fiction closer to the early American science fiction than later, more progressive models

Un'idea di fantascienza che, a ben vedere, deve molto ai *pulp magazines* degli anni Venti e Trenta, meno ai classici degli anni Cinquanta, meno ancora alle sperimentazioni degli anni Sessanta.¹³⁹ (Iannuzzi, 2014a:286)

This contrast between the magazine's appearance and its content is already indicative of a certain ambiguity that characterised this periodical, but which also contributed to its unique character. Vittorio Curtoni himself seemed to be caught between his attraction for science fiction's sense of wonder (a term usually reserved for the classic science fiction of the 1930s and 1940) and his interest in the more intellectual and committed New Wave SF.

5.4.1 Vittorio Curtoni as the "unitary voice"

As I stated above, *Robot* was dominated by the strong editorial presence of Vittorio Curtoni, and this was reflected at several levels. Although Curtoni claimed that he wanted to be a democratic presence, taking into account the preferences of his readers, ultimately as the editor he felt he had the right to choose what was best for the magazine and the idea of science fiction that it expressed. This meant that even when he seemed to accept readers' requests, he only did so up to a certain point, for example by publishing a popular author that he did not like but choosing

¹³⁹ [An idea of science fiction which, when closely examined, is very much indebted to the Twenties and Thirties pulp magazines, less to the classics of the 1950s, even less to the experimental trends of the Sixties.]

the material that was closer to his ideas of science fiction (see the publication of “Death and the Senator” by Arthur C. Clarke, below).

Robot was Curtoni’s creature, a dream come true and, as Giachini notes, he had an emotional bond with the magazine

È tangibile in ogni passo la sua partecipazione emotiva alla nascita di una creatura palesemente immaginata, progettata, voluta e finalmente realizzata nei fatti, e dalla quale si attendono grandi cose.¹⁴⁰ (Giachino, 2002:978)

Such involvement is particularly evident in the editorials, where Curtoni’s topics range from personal anecdotes to more analytical/theoretical pieces, and his tone changes from whimsical reminiscence to angry accusations. Like the editorials, the letters section also touched various topics, often commenting and expanding on issues started by the editorials. The section started to appear from issue 3 and continued to the last issue under Curtoni’s editorship. From issue 6, the letters section appeared in the last pages of the magazine, often just before the back cover, and they helped to create a sort of discursive act where Curtoni symbolically had the last word.

Vittorio Curtoni edited the magazine until the double issue of July/August 1978, No. 28/29, but remained on the editorial board until issue 31, when he definitively left the magazine with an editorial where he explained the reasons for his departure. The magazine carried on under the joint editorship of Giuseppe Lippi (previously a *Robot* contributor), publisher Michele Armenia and Giovanna Fasolino, but clearly their editorial work was much more limited. From issue 30 to issue 40 of July-August 1979, when it ceased publication¹⁴¹, *Robot* only published translated anthologies, either of specific writers or edited collections dealing with particular themes¹⁴² and cut most of the informative sections as well as the parts that had

¹⁴⁰ [his emotional participation in the birth of something clearly imagined, designed and finally concretely made, and from which great things are expected, is tangible at every step.]

¹⁴¹ *Robot* resumed publication in 2003 until 2006, with Vittorio Curtoni again as its editor.

¹⁴² The anthologies published between September 1978 and July/August 1979 were: *La banca della memoria – Il meglio della fantascienza nel 1976*, ed. D. A. Wollheim, *Strani fatti*, R. Lafferty, *Nuove costellazioni*, T.M. Disch and C. Naylor eds., *Le Verdi colline della Terra*, R.A. Heinlein, *Canzoni d’ombra e di stelle*, George R.R. Martin, *Al servizio di uno strano potere*, Samuel R.

represented the great novelty of *Robot*, such as the readers' letters and the more controversial sections such as "Opinioni" and "Polemiche".

The demise of *Robot* caused a certain amount of polemical debate and various explanations have been given, from its excessive ambition to combine the old with the new (Armenia, *Robot* 40, July/August 1979), to how the magazine slowly lost its edge (Giachino, 2002:98). Certainly there was, at some point, a drop in sales, that caused the publisher Giovanni Armenia to put an end to the magazine. All these factors have to be taken into consideration but, without doubt, Curtoni's departure was one of the main causes of the magazine's decline. Vittorio Curtoni had been not only the driving force behind *Robot*'s creation, but his personal mark pervaded the whole magazine. A strong editorial presence is perhaps fundamental for any successful periodical and it has been a key element in the development of science fiction in English. The success of *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Galaxy Science Fiction* were in part due to the work of their respective editors, John Campbell Jr. and Horace L. Gold, who played a crucial role in shaping the identity of the magazines they edited, for example by commissioning certain types of stories. In this respect, the influence of the editor of a magazine that publishes mainly translations is more limited, as he or she cannot have a direct relationship with the actual authors. This means that the process of building the magazine's identity, from a literary point of view, has to take place at the level of what is selected for translation, and how such material is translated. This is something that, following Matthew Phillpott's theoretical framework for the analysis of periodicals, may be seen as part of the "compositional codes"¹⁴³ of a magazine, that is to say its textual and visual features (Phillpotts, 2013).

5.5 The science fiction published in *Robot*

The kind of stories selected for a magazine are obviously very important in creating a particular identity. In the history of science fiction, most magazines have been characterised by the type of stories they tended to publish. This was the case in

Delany, *Le radici del male*, F. Lieber and C.D. Simak, *Nella sala dei re marziani. Il meglio della fantascienza nel 1978*, E. Ellison et. al, eds., *Racconti di un vecchio primate*, J. Tiptree Jr., *La stirpe senza nome*, J. Wyndham and R. Bradbury, *Copia per recensione*.

¹⁴³ The "compositional codes" are part of a set of codes that characterises periodicals.

the US with the mostly technological stories published by *Astounding* and the sociological science fiction published by *Galaxy*. In the UK, the magazine *New World* was also associated with a particular type of science fiction, called *New Wave* (See Chapter I). In all these cases, the magazine's specialization functioned not only as a container for a particular type of story but, since the authors needed to sell, an invitation to write the kind of story the magazine would buy. In point of fact, the editors of the magazines themselves sometimes commissioned stories or edited them heavily, to make them fit with the identity of their magazine.

Since *Robot* mainly published non-Italian science fiction, it could not rely on writers contributing to build its identity. This was created through the selection of specific narrative material and its translation. In this section, I will look at the kind of science fiction published in *Robot*, showing how the choice of particular short stories significantly contributed to provide *Robot* with a specific identity coherent with other elements present in the magazine.

Among commentators, there seems to be the idea that the narrative material published in *Robot* was varied and representative of a large spectrum of SF literature (Giachino, 2002:102)¹⁴⁴. Also, Iannuzzi remarks on the eclectic aspect of the stories published in *Robot*, which she sees as due to the lack of a specific SF school in the 1970s

un eclettismo che comunque riflette la situazione della produzione di genere in lingua inglese, caratterizzata dall'assenza di scuole o tendenze forti, tra il riflusso della *New Wave* già compiuto, e un *cyberpunk* che deve ancora emergere.¹⁴⁵ (Iannuzzi, 2014a:298)

Iannuzzi's statement about *Robot*'s eclectic character reflecting the 1970s SF scene appears to imply that the translations published in *Robot* all came from source texts published in the 1970s. An analysis of the chronology of the source

¹⁴⁴ Può essere presa a campione rappresentativa di quasi tutti i diversi aspetti della letteratura di fantascienza [It can be taken as representative of almost all the different aspects of science fiction literature] (Giachino, 2002:102).

¹⁴⁵ [An eclecticism that however reflects the situation of the production of genre literature in English, characterized by the absence of schools or strong trends, between the return of the already past *New Wave*, and the emerging *cyberpunk*.]

texts, however, shows that this was not the case and that during the first year of life of the magazine there was a sort of balance in relation to the chronological distribution of the stories published, with a slight prevalence for stories published in the 1970s. It was only in the following years that a marked preference emerged for stories published in the 1970s and fewer representatives of the previous decades.

Curtoni actually stated that, in spite of his specific preferences for authors like J.G. Ballard and Thomas Dish¹⁴⁶, he tried to meet readers' demands when choosing what to publish

sono io a scegliere i racconti che vengono pubblicati, e nel farlo cerco di tener presenti le esigenze di un pubblico che chiede cose diverse l'una dall'altra senza venir meno a certi canoni estetici su cui si basa, da anni, il mio lavoro.¹⁴⁷ (Curtoni, *Robot* 6, September, 1976:3)

The reference to aesthetic standards is revealing, as it points to a particular editorial agenda. Although it is true that *Robot* did not represent a specific subgenre or trend, it had other means to create a sense of unity and coherence, and translation was one of these. I would like to argue that many stories published in *Robot* are characterised by a particular tonal quality and tend to focus on particular themes - all elements that provide an impression of cohesion and unity.

Another interesting element is the increasing tendency to favour stories already published in anthologies in the source culture, which Curtoni himself acknowledged as a way of finding new interesting writers (Curtoni, *Robot* 3, May 1977:2). This was the case, for example, with four stories published in December 1976 (Issue nine), all part of the anthology *Stopwatch*, edited by George Hay and published in 1974. While this reduced Curtoni's subjective approach, as he imported in effect

¹⁴⁶ Vittorio Curtoni commented at different times on his preference for authors of the New Wave, the current of experimental SF mostly associated with J.G. Ballard and the magazine *New World*.

¹⁴⁷ [I am the one who chooses the short-stories to be published, and when doing so I try to keep in mind the expectations of an audience asking for different things but I don't give up certain aesthetic standards which have been at the basis of my work for years.]

someone else's choices, it is also true that the original anthologies were often innovative publications, used to foreground new science fiction. For example, some stories had originally been published in *Orbit*, a series of anthologies published by Damon Knight in the 1960s. This material was such that, as James observes, "it would never have been accepted by any editor magazine apart from Moorcock" (James, 1994:173), highlighting the daring, experimental content of the stories. Another one was *Final Stage: the Ultimate Science Fiction Anthology* (1974), edited by Edward L. Ferman and Barry Malzberg. *Robot* also published a few 'feminist' SF stories that had also appeared in famous anthologies: "When it Changed" by Joanna Russ, which first appeared in *Again Dangerous Visions* (1972) edited by Harlan Ellison¹⁴⁸, and "Houston, Houston, do you read?" by James Tiptree Jr. published in *Aurora: Beyond Equality* (1976), edited by Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson.

As I said earlier, in spite of the apparent variety most stories published in *Robot* seem to share a particular mood, a focus on psychological elements and what can perhaps be described as "humanist" issues. This tendency was highlighted by the editors of the SF magazine *Fantascienza*¹⁴⁹, who in their review of the second issue of *Robot* noted "una forte propensione del curatore per i racconti ricchi di sfumature e di poesia" [a strong inclination of the editor for tales full of nuances and poetry] (1976:8-9). In some instances, this quality was favoured over more widely recognisable generic traits. In the second issue of *Robot*, a reader lamented the lack of "science fictional" quality in "Una notte" (1976), (The Night of the Nickel Beer, Kris Neville, 1970) and Curtoni replied that the story's science fictional element was implicit and that it was a splendid "racconto d'atmosfera" - an expression used to describe a type of story focusing on the psychology of the characters and the creation of a mood. The word "atmosfera", or expressions that evoke similar features, often appear in Curtoni's description of his favourite stories, either in his editorials or in his replies to readers' letters. For example, he describes

¹⁴⁸ This is the 'sequel' of the famous anthology "Dangerous Visions" published in 1967 and edited by Harlan Ellison, which was the manifesto of New Wave in the US.

¹⁴⁹ The text does not indicate the author of the review, however it was presumably written by the editors, Maurizio Nati e Sandro Pergameno who often signed articles and translations together. (Fantascienza Ciscato, 1976, no. 2, Milano: Ennio Ciscato Editore).

Theodore Sturgeon's story's "Need" (1960), published as "Gente" in the third issue of *Robot*, June 1976, as "una dolcissima parabola su un mondo di sentimenti timidi" [an exquisite parable about a world of timid feelings]. Richard McKenna's story "The Secret Place" (1966), translated as "Il posto segreto" (1977), is again described as "un tenero lavoro d'atmosfera" [a soft work of mood] (Curtoni, 1977) while Judith Merrill's tale "That only a mother" (1948), translated as "Solo una madre" (1978) is presented as a story with "un'aura di incantata poeticità" [an aura of enchanted poeticity] (Curtoni, 1978:). These evaluative comments show how the selection of texts tended to privilege stories that possessed some specific stylistic and tonal elements.

These stylistic elements and the blurring of borders between science fiction and fantasy which also emerged in some stories published in *Robot* indicate that perhaps one of the models used by Curtoni was *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, a periodical whose penchant for literary quality and a flexible attitude towards labels such as "fantasy" and "science fiction" was well-known

Stylistic elegance became the hallmark of Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas at *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, which featured classic reprints as well as new fiction, and mixed literary fantasy with its sf. (Wolfe, 2003:100)

Fourteen stories published in *Robot* had originally appeared in this magazine, a number higher than for other magazines from which *Robot* took stories.

Similar criteria were also clearly applied when Curtoni published authors that were not among his favourites. In *Robot 2*, a story by Arthur C. Clarke was published because he was very popular among readers, in spite of Curtoni's lack of enthusiasm. The story, "Death and the Senator" (1961), was chosen because it was one of Clarke's stories "più umane, più suggestive" [most human and evocative ones] (Curtoni, 1976:4). In conclusion, I would argue that even when Curtoni published authors he did not particularly like, he selected stories that had some of the aesthetic features that he favoured. It could be said that, using J.G

Ballard's famous definition, most stories published in *Robot* explore "the inner space" rather than the "outer space"¹⁵⁰.

In the next section, I will focus on a few discursive and thematic elements that emerged from an analysis of the editorials which, as I will show, were both stated explicitly by the editor and other contributors to the magazines in their critical pieces, but also expressed in the narrative elements, thus shaping the particular 'voice' of the magazine.

5.6 Science fiction as a key to the present

One of the most frequent topics was the relationship between science fiction and reality. In his editorials (and also in his replies to readers), Curtoni often highlights the relationship between science fiction and reality, indicating that science fiction can be a tool for understanding the present. For example, in relation to a story by Brian Aldiss, "Soft Predicament", published in Issue 4 of July 1976, Curtoni says in the editorial that "Aldiss ci riporta ai problemi di oggi (...) per ricordarci, forse, che la science fiction è solo lo specchio deformante del nostro presente" [Aldiss takes us back to today's problems (...) maybe to remind us that science fiction is only the deforming mirror of our present] (Curtoni, July 1976:4). In another editorial, entitled "Il reale quotidiano" and published in Issue eight, he explains why he published a short story by Lino Aldani, although its science fictional content was minimal. His idea of science fiction is that it is not important where and when events take place, whether "nella pianura padana o sulla Terra d'un remoto futuro. Quando gli scrittori hanno qualcosa da dire, la metafora si anima, prende vita sua, diventa allegoria del presente" [in the Po plain or on the Earth in the far future. When writers have something to say, the metaphor becomes alive, acquires its own life, becomes an allegory of the present] (Curtoni, November 1976:2). As a matter of fact, this element is especially evoked in relation to the Italian writers, whose stories are often described in terms of their relationship with the present. The use of metaphor to describe the problems of today's world is often mentioned by Curtoni as one of

¹⁵⁰ The term "inner space" has been mainly used with reference to the British SF New Wave and especially to J.G Ballard who advocated a science fiction that focused on the biological sciences rather than the physical sciences as these only allowed an exploration of the human condition (James, 1994:170).

the strong points of science fiction. A story by Vittorio Catani is described by Curtoni as “una parabola di fantamarxismo che dice tante cose sul nostro mondo, sul nostro vivere oggi. Alla faccia del compromesso storico” [A parable of fictional Marxism which says many things about our world, the way we live today. So much for the historic compromise¹⁵¹] (Curtoni, *Robot* 22, January 1978:4).

One of the stories that is most interesting from this point of view is the winner of a best short story competition held by the magazine among Italian SF writers. The story, entitled “In morte di Aina” (*Robot* 19, October 1977), was written by the young Morena Medri who, in a short biosketch accompanying the story, presented herself as a militant and a comrade. “In morte di Aina “[On the death of Aina], is told in the first person by an alien woman who left her native planet Leimaran to follow an Earthman who humiliates her and forces her to change her physical features to be more like the women from Earth. The narrative focuses on her last moments, her going to a bar where she has a confrontation with some young thugs who beat her to death. As a matter of fact, the story is clearly a very transparent metaphor for the marginalisation felt by many young people at the time and of the social and political violence affecting their life, as these words uttered by Aina convey

I terrestri ci odiano, dietro alle ipocrite parole di umanitarismo e progresso civile che spremano ai congressi, come hanno sempre odiato i comunisti, i negri, gli omosessuali e i poeti anarchici. Perché siamo tutto questo, noi di Leimaran¹⁵² (Medri, 1977:23)

It is not surprising that its topical character was highlighted by the editors of *Un'Ambigua Utopia*, who praised the story as an example of how it was possible to write SF dealing with current problems such as feminism, marginalisation and young people's future (UAU 1: 1978:13).

As Renato Besana and Dino Caroglio indicate in *Robot* 9, Italian writers of science fiction are not only seen as an alternative to the mainstream contemporary literary

¹⁵¹ This is a reference to the alliance between the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democrats created in the 1970s.

¹⁵² [Earthlings hate us, in spite of the hypocritical words of humanitarianism and civil progress that they waste at conferences, they hate us in the same way that they have always hated communists, blacks, homosexuals and anarchic poets. Because we are all this, we from Leimaran.]

production, but they are also invested with a revolutionary political role, as their reference to “l’immaginazione al potere”, the well-known 1968 protest movement slogan, indicate.

lavorano anche per portare l’immaginazione al potere, dopo tanto stucchevole psicologismo e quasi realismo dei paludati retori del nostro romanzo di consumo. La fantascienza è la Grande Arma, perché la finzione è l’unica che consenta di parlare della realtà senza complessi e condizionamenti.¹⁵³ (Besana and Caroglio, *Robot* 9, December 1976:133)

Curtoni reiterates the criticism towards official literature in his editorial for issue eleven of February 1977. When commenting on mainstream Italian writers who are able to deal with the fantastic, he states that “Calvino è una rara eccezione in seno ad una letteratura “normale” barbosa, ripetitiva e praticamente inutile” [Calvino is a rare exception within a “normal” literature that is boring, repetitive and practically useless]. (Curtoni, *Robot* 11, February 1977)

Iannuzzi’s analysis of Curtoni’s critical position highlights a contradiction between his appreciation of science fiction’s sense of wonder, i.e. a use of the fantastic for its own sake, and Curtoni’s criticism of that same sense of wonder when it offers escapism from reality and so acquires a reactionary quality (Iannuzzi, 2014a: 300). On the other hand, if we look at this apparent contradiction from the point of view of counter-culture, it is perhaps possible to explain it. Vittorio Curtoni was closer to the positions expressed by the collective *Un’ambigua Utopia* than it appeared, which probably included an idea of “imagination” as play. In his *Guida alla fantascienza*, a manual about science fiction written with Giuseppe Lippi, Curtoni highlights the “carattere ludico” [playful character] of science fiction, but this playfulness is seen as a way of freeing the imagination and establishing a new relationship with the universe. To achieve this, the notion of “divertimento” [entertainment] needs to be reconceptualised. The aim is to

¹⁵³ [they also work to give power to the imagination, after so much tedious psychologism and quasi realism from the pompous rhetoricians of our popular fiction. Science fiction is the Great Weapon, because fiction is the only thing that allows one to talk about reality without complexes and conditioning.]

liberare l'immaginario del lettore e portarlo in un nuovo rapporto con le cose, con l'universo. A questa funzione è strumentale il concetto di "divertimento", che occorrerà strappare, magari a viva forza, dalle noiose mani della cultura ufficiale.¹⁵⁴ (Curtoni and Lippi, 1978:55)

Curtoni's insistence on science fiction as a way of dealing with the present and its problems demonstrates a vision of SF that will be even clearer and more explicit in political fanzines like *UAU*. Given that traditional left-wing culture has always privileged a realist approach to literature, the representation of science fiction as a key to unlocking the present appears as a way of legitimising a genre that leftists politically-oriented people tended to see as just another product of American capitalism.

5.7 *Robot and politics*

The interest in the connection between science fiction and politics remained one of the best-known features of *Robot*. This issue is most hotly discussed in relation to an article written by Remo Guerrini, published in issue twelve of the magazine, March 1977.

The article, a strong polemic against those publishers and writers who presented themselves as 'apolitical', was a call to arms to engage with politics, and state one's position clearly. It would cause both angry reactions and praise, as testified by readers' letters and noted by Curtoni himself

Le reazioni al pezzo di Guerrini riempiono, ancora oggi, il tavolo della mia scrivania: lettere di compagni che mi incitano a proseguire su questa strada, lettere di fascisti che s'incazzano per essersi trovate spiattellate sul muso alcune verità. Lettere di gente che minaccia di non comperare più la rivista se il mio "sinistrismo" non troverà un freno.¹⁵⁵ (Curtoni, *UAU* 2, April 1978:16)

¹⁵⁴ [To free readers' imagination and take them into a new relationship with things, with the universe. To do this the concept of "entertainment" is instrumental but it will be necessary to tear it away, even by force, from the boring grasp of official culture.]

¹⁵⁵ [The response to Guerrini's piece still fill my desk: letters from comrades urging me to continue on this road, letters from fascists getting pissed off because they had some truths thrown in their face. Letters from people threatening that they won't buy the magazine any longer if I don't put a stop to my "leftist" attitude.]

Curtoni declares explicitly his support for Guerrini's views and, in the following issues, appears to intensify the magazine's political connotation, not only through explicit interventions in the editorials or the letters section, but also through some narrative material. He also tries to reassure his readers about the identity of the magazine. In an editorial entitled "Una scelta politica" in issue 15 of June 1977 Curtoni explains how

Qualcuno teme che d'ora in poi *Robot* debba trasformarsi in un "bollettino di Guerra" per gli Alfieri della rivoluzione marxista o neo-marxista; sono quindi lieto di poter smentire le paure di questi signori (...) io sono, sono sempre stato persona di "sinistra" (...) è ovvio perciò che le mie scelte ideologiche marcino in un senso determinato.¹⁵⁶ (Curtoni, *Robot* 15, June 1977:2)

In issues 24 and 25, published in March and April 1978, respectively, Curtoni develops the argument about the need to listen also to dissenting voices as a fundamental need within a democratic society. In his March editorial entitled "Fantascienza e dialettica", he highlights the importance of such debate: "se non esiste confronto, se non c'è dialettica, che diavolo di crescita democratica potrà mai verificarsi?" [If there is no confrontation, if there is no dialectics, what kind of democratic growth could ever happen?] (*Robot* 24, March 1978). Keeping faith to this statement, in the following issue of April 1978 he publishes a story by Robert Heinlein, an American writer whose political views have been controversial and who has usually been perceived as a right-wing sympathizer. The story, "The Roads Must Roll" (1940) published as "Le strade devono scorrere" and translated by Rossella Roncari, deals with a future America where the skilled workers responsible for a system of moving roads rebel against their current condition and threaten to blow up the system if their requests are not met. They are defeated by a chief engineer who, with the help of an elite group of soldier/engineers, manages to stop their leader.

¹⁵⁶ [Some people are afraid that from now on *Robot* will turn into a "war bulletin" for the flagmen of the marxist or neo-marxist revolution: I am happy to disprove the fears of these people.... I am, I've always been a "left" wing person (...) so it is obvious that my ideological choices go into a specific direction.]

Commenting on the story, Curtoni observes that it represents “un conflitto interno a un sistema che non conosce vere alternative democratiche, cioè in cui lo stesso concetto di rivoluzione viene usato quale strumento di sopraffazione.” [a conflict within a system that does not have real democratic alternatives, where the concept itself of revolution is used as a repressive tool] (Curtoni, *Robot* 25, 1978:3). Considering the period during which Curtoni was writing this editorial, which saw an increase in political violence (in March 1978 the Red Brigade had kidnapped and killed Aldo Moro), it is difficult not to see this comment with its reference to clashing groups as an echo of events happening in Italy. As Balestrini and Moroni highlight, the end of the 1970s was characterised by an extremely violent climate, with the political and cultural conflict infiltrating all sites of society

uno scontro duro, forse il più duro, tra le classi e dentro la classe, che si sia mai verificato dall'unità d'Italia. Quarantamila denunciati, quindicimila arrestati, quattromila condannati a migliaia di anni di galera, e poi morti e feriti, a centinaia, da entrambe le parti.¹⁵⁷ (Balestrini and Moroni, 1988)

5.8. *Robot* and sexual politics

The political themes became at some point intertwined with questions of gender. The first story where such a combination is evident is “In morte di Aina” (see section 5.6) where the young protagonist is clearly a symbol of persecuted “otherness” not only because she is an alien woman, who will be abused and killed by a group of hostile Earth men, but also because she declares herself as being a representative of all oppressed groups: “i comunisti, i negri, gli omosessuali e i poeti anarchici. Perché siamo tutto questo, noi di Leimaran” [communists, gays and anarchic poets. Because we, from Leimaran, are all of these] (Medri, 1977:23). Although stories written by women had been published before¹⁵⁸, it is only after Medri’s story

¹⁵⁷[a harsh clash, perhaps the harshest, between classes and within classes, which has ever happened since Italian unification. Forty thousand people denounced, fifteen thousand arrested, four thousand sentenced to thousands of years in jail, and people dead and injured, hundreds of them, on both sides.]

¹⁵⁸ A story by James Tiptree Jr was published in *Robot* 8, November 1976, two stories, respectively by Kathleen Brennan and Josephine Saxton, appeared in the following December 1976 issue. “The Missing Man” by Katherine McLean was published in *Robot* 12, March 1977 while “Gita al pianeta madre” by Italian writer Anna Rinonapoli appeared in *Robot* 15, June 1977.

that an increase of women's science fiction in the magazine can be seen. Of particular relevance were explicit feminist stories, whose publication started with the well-known "When it changed" (1972) by Joanna Russ, winner of the Nebula Award for best SF story in 1972, published in issue 21 of December 1977 as "Quando cambio". This is a story which is part of the same utopian female world the writer described in *The Female Man* (1975). There followed "Intracom" (1974) by Ursula LeGuin and "Le donne invisibili", the translation of "The Women Men Don't See" (1973) by James Tiptree Jr, which both appeared on issue 23 of February 1978; another story by James Tiptree, "Houston, Houston, do you read?" (1976), translated as "Houston, Houston, ci sentite?", was featured in issue 26 of May 1978; Issue 27 saw the publication of a story by John Wyndham, also set in a women's only world, "Consider Her Ways" (1956) translated as "Considera le sue vie", which provides a darker portrait of feminist separatist utopias and was perhaps meant to counterbalance feminist depictions of future female utopias with a man's perspective. Finally, in the last issue under Curtoni's editorship, No. 28/29 of July/August 1978, two more stories dealing with women's issues appeared - the classic "That only a mother" (1948) by Judith Merrill, translated as "Solo una madre", and "Of mist, and grass and sand" (1973) by Vonda McIntyr. It is clear that it was particularly in the last year of the magazine that an interest in feminism developed, and this can be taken as a further sign of an increasing politicisation of the magazine. Attention to feminism was typical of the so-called 1977 movement and it was an important component of *Un'ambigua Utopia*, as explicitly stated in the third issue of the fanzine (Summer 1978), where a short piece signed by "Le ambigue" denounced the sexism of traditional science fiction and asked women readers to contribute to the genre, discussing their relationship with science fiction.

5.9 The translations published in *Robot*

Between April 1976 and July/August 1978, that is to say during Vittorio Curtoni's editorship, *Robot* published 127 stories, mainly translations from English, while the rest were mostly Italian originals. In spite of the magazine's support for non-English science fiction, very few non-English stories were in fact published (Table 7).

Robot's general translation policy appears to be one of close rendering of the source texts. A more marked respect for the source texts was to be expected, given Vittorio Curtoni's harsh criticism of *Urania's* translated stories.

Table 7 - Translations and original Italian texts published in *Robot*

TRANSLATORS	Translations from English	Translations from French	Translations from German	Italian texts
	101	1	3	23
Abramo Luraschi	43			
Gabriele Tamburini	20			
Paolo Busnelli	9			
Eddy Masuzzi	7			
Mario De Luigi/Antonio Bellomi	6			
Rossella Roncari	4			
Vittorio Curtoni	3			
Mariangela Sala			3	
Gianni Montanari	1			
Giuseppe Botturi		1		
Remo Guerrini	1			
Giuseppe Lippi	1			
Riccardo Valla	1			
Giorgio Pagliaro	1			
Vanna Barcaroli	1			
Maria Regina Perissinotto	1			

The first observation that can be made is that all translations published in *Robot* were clearly labelled as translations. This was signalled by information placed at the end of the story that indicated the original title, the name of the translator, the year and source of the original text. However, even before reaching the inner pages of the magazine, the mediated nature of the published narratives was clearly signalled at the paratextual level, since the original titles and their Italian translation in brackets were given in the short 'blurbs' about each story on the magazine's back cover.

This visibility seems to be part of the trend that characterised some publishing of SF in the 1970s. Although *Robot* did not have the label "unabridged translation" on the cover, as the books in the new specialised SF series I described in Chapter IV, the proximity of the original titles and their Italian translations could be seen as having a similar function, showing readers that the narrative material was translated and also, to a certain extent, that the translations were 'faithful' to the STs, even if limited to the fragments represented by the titles. Interestingly, this feature went through some mismanagement in the two issues that followed Vittorio Curtoni's departure as the magazine's editor. In issue 31, published in October 1978, which contained the second anthology of the series, "Strange Doings" (1972) by Raphael Lafferty, translated as "Strani fatti", only the Italian titles appeared on the back cover although the introduction to the anthology by Piergiorgio Nicolazzini did not mention the Italian titles, and used the English titles. However, since the English titles and the Italian translations re-appeared on the back-covers of the subsequent issues, it may be concluded that the different approach in the previous two issues was due to temporary problems resulting from Curtoni's defection, rather than a change of editorial policy.

5.9.1 The translation of titles in *Robot*

The juxtaposition of the English titles of the source texts with their Italian translations would have highlighted any substantial departure from the surface structure of the source text, so it is not surprising that most translated titles were fairly close renderings of the original. A comparison of the original English titles with their Italian translations allowed me to see that, in point of fact, of the one

hundred and five translated titles only about eight could be defined as complete rewritings of the original titles, while the vast majority, over fifty, were either literal translations or transpositions. Other translated titles show some changes, often the omission of one element or some other small alteration that did not make the Italian versions too different from the original ones. Given this small percentage of adaptations, it is worth looking into the rewritten titles to see what kind of changes were made.

Table 8 – Rewritten titles and semi-literal titles in Robot

	Original Titles	Translated Titles	Back Translation
1	His Own Kind	Una storia di lupi	A story of wolves
2	Need	Gente	People
3	Eurema's Dam	Buono a nulla	Good for nothing
4	Double Whammy	Malocchio	Evil eye
5	Mother by Protest	Un figlio piovuto dal cielo	A son fell from the sky (piovuto = rained)
6	Lovelife of the Leglorn	Ma le gambe	But the legs
7	Breath's a Ware That Will Not Keep	Istinto materno	Maternal instinct
8	Jackpot	Colpo gobo	Dirty trick
9	The Cosmic Charge Account	Miss Phoebe e l'energia cosmica	Miss Phoebe and cosmic energy
Semi-literal titles			
10	By the Falls	L'uomo delle cascade	The man of the falls
11	A Little Something for Us Temponauts	Noi temponauti	Us temponauts
12	Nobody Here But Us Shadows	Solo noi ombre	Only us shadows
13	Sketches Among the Ruins of My Mind	Fra le rovine della mia mente	Among the ruins of my mind

As it is typical with rewritten titles, it is not always easy to understand the reasons for changes. Titles 1 and 2 were probably changed because the resulting Italian literal translations would be too vague and not very elegant. In 1, the possessive adjective "his" would lose its masculine reference since Italian possessive adjectives agree with the owned thing, rather than the person, and a literal

translation would result in a rather vague phrase. In the second example, “Need” is perfectly translatable in Italian as “Necessità”, a word that is not very elegant. In the case of “Eurema’s Dam”, Eurema is the name given to a Greek goddess mentioned in the story and was perhaps deemed too obscure, although in later translations the title was rendered as “La madre di Eurema”¹⁵⁹. “Mother by Protest” was probably changed because of linguistic constraints although the resulting translation, “Un figlio piovuto dal cielo”, appears to misrepresent the disquieting element of the story, which deals with a woman’s pregnancy due to an invading alien presence¹⁶⁰. The expression “piovere dal cielo”, literally “to rain from the sky” is associated with ideas of luck and divine benevolence, which are at odds with the theme of the story. Linguistic problems may also explain the rendering of the slang expression “Double Whammy” with “Malocchio”, although the Italian translation - which means “evil eye” - evokes the stock imagery of horror. Example 7 was clearly changed because of cultural constraints, since “Breath’s is a Ware that will not keep” is a quotation from the poem *Reveille* by A.E Houseman, a late Victorian poet unknown in Italy.

One element worth noting is that in a number of cases the Italian translation contains a reference to “animate beings”, either explicit or implicit, as in examples 2, 3 and 7. The same happens with the change in example 9, with the introduction of the implicitly human “Miss Phoebe” in the Italian title. This tendency is also present in the titles that were slightly changed, the semi-literal ones, as in example 10 with the addition of the word “l’uomo”, and the shortened titles of 11 and 12 that result in a reinforcement of the “us” in the title. There may be a number of explanations for these changes, such as the fact that in this way the Italian titles are better-sounding. However, as I will show in later sections, the “humanistic” perspective in science fiction was an important element of *Robot* and, as a consequence, these changes can be regarded as part of a more general interpretation of science fiction projected by *Robot*.

¹⁵⁹ For example in the same year, 1978, the story was translated as “La madre di Eurema” by Roberta Rambelli in the collection *I Premi Hugo 1955-1975*, published by Nord.

¹⁶⁰ The story would be adapted into a horror film, “The Stranger Within”, in 1974.

This entitling strategy can be understood as a way of providing visible evidence to *Robot's* translation approach of keeping close to the source text. Although such 'fidelity' was never explicitly stated, it was implied in Vittorio Curtoni's frequent criticism of manipulatory translation practices, mainly exemplified by *Urania*. In the next section, I will examine the specific characteristics of this source-oriented approach through an analysis of three short stories published in *Robot*. I will show that, in spite of the tendency to remain close to the original texts' surface structures, the translations highlighted certain elements that were coherent with the general discourse about science fiction expressed by the magazine.

5.10 Comparative textual analysis of three translated short stories from *Robot*

The tendency to produce close renderings of the source texts, which had appeared in the translation of titles, has been confirmed by an analysis of the translations of the actual stories. cursory examinations of a number of translated stories showed no evidence of heavy interference of the kind seen in *Urania*, such as cuts and additions or radical adaptations - something that may also be due to a careful selection of the originals in the first place. Readability was often sacrificed to ensure the text adhered to the semantic and syntactic structure of the original text, with scarce use of domesticating strategies. In addition, no footnotes were generally added to explain particular cultural references. The identification of these traits has been tested through a close comparative analysis of three stories.

The choice of which stories to analyse was made considering a number of aspects: time of publication, translator and significant themes. The stories I chose were published at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the life of the magazine, respectively, and by different translators: Vittorio Curtoni, Abramo Luraschi and Paolo Busnelli. While Abramo Luraschi and Paolo Busnelli can be seen as *Robot's* main translators, as they translated most stories published in *Robot*, Vittorio Curtoni as the editor had a special role, and his translations may be regarded as reflecting his critical views on translation and science fiction, in addition to his editorials.

In the following sections, I will describe the stories I have selected and show how their translations contributed to the magazine's general discourse, and particularly to Vittorio Curtoni's view of science fiction. Here again a descriptive approach has been adopted (Toury, 1995), whereby I first conducted an initial comparison between the source text and the target text at the level of sentences and clauses, and then I selected ad hoc elements for close analysis, on the basis of significant shifts in the translated segments.

5.10.1 Comparative Textual Analysis of "I, dreamer"

The first story whose translation I chose to analyse is "I, dreamer" by Walter Miller Jr.¹⁶¹ which was originally published in the SF magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1953. It appeared in the second issue of *Robot*, May 1976, translated as "lo sogno" [I dream] by Vittorio Curtoni. This was one of three stories translated by Vittorio Curtoni himself (see Table above), the other two being "Mondo Pietrificato" [ST - Petrified World] (1968) by Robert Sheckley, also included in the second issue of *Robot*, and "Gente" [ST- Need] (1960) by Theodore Sturgeon, published in the third issue, June 1976. Although Curtoni had added his editorial work to his role of translator since the beginning of his career in science fiction¹⁶², he limited his translations for *Robot* to these three stories, possibly because his editorial work took over.

Curtoni expresses different degrees of appreciation for the stories that he translated. He particularly praises Theodore Sturgeon's as one of "dilagante bellezza" [overwhelming beauty] while Sheckley's story is almost dismissed as "non è un capolavoro ma è carino" [it is not a masterpiece but it is nice] (*Robot* 2, May 1976:4). Curtoni's assessment of Miller's story is more cryptic, as he describes it as "una cosa tutta a sé, forse la risposta polemica di Miller a certe fantasie futuristiche di taglio troppo ottimista" [It is a story of its own kind, perhaps Miller's

¹⁶¹ Walter Miller Jr. names is especially associated with the novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), which is set in a post-nuclear holocaust world whereby humanity has regressed to a medieval stage of progress. A book found by a monk of the Leibowitz order shows how to restore technological knowledge.

¹⁶² Vittorio Curtoni was a translator for the Galassia book series, which he also edited together with Gianni Montanari, and worked as a translator for Mondadori after he left *Robot*, translating many works in the Urania series.

polemical answer to certain futuristic fantasies that are too optimistic] (*Ibid.*). Curtoni's 's hint regarding the originality of the story and his vague reference to "futuristic fantasies" prompted me to choose "I, dreamer" for a comparative translation.

The story deals with a sentient starship, a machine named Clicker who has the human brain of a child at its core. This makes it different from the other machines, as it can "be disobedient and illogical" and is therefore something that Clicker is unable to evaluate. Clicker has been built to function as a sort of super weapon, a starship that can fly without a human crew and respond to unforeseen problems in a way that a normal machine cannot do. It is the first of an army of intelligent machines which the ruler of this world, a tyrant named Shames, wants to use to conquer the Earth from which the people in the story once came. During the story, it is revealed that Shames has taken the human brains from babies stolen from their mothers, something that is described at the beginning with a prologue that records the different perceptions a baby has as its world and identity change dramatically.

As the story switches from the third person narration of the prologue to a first-person narrator, it becomes clearer that its real theme is not so much one of conflict but a definition of what it means to be human, as we follow Clicker's attempts to understand what it is and what it can do. Its interactions with humans around him also have this function. Basher, Clicker's 'Teacher', is afraid and irritated by the machine's greater logical capacity and punishes it anytime he does not like its answers. Janna, the kind female mechanic pursued by Basher and friendly towards Clicker, is herself a victim as her own child was stolen to build other machines like Clicker. Janna is also part of a so-called Freedom Clan, a clandestine organisation whose purpose is to end the dictatorship. During a check flight, Basher reveals that the clandestine group is about to be captured and attacks Janna. Attempting to protect the woman, Clicker kills Basher and then, realising that both of them will be destroyed once landed, Janna suggests that Clicker launches itself on Secon Samesh's palace, killing both of them but also the dictator and presumably, ending the regime.

Different motifs intertwine in the story, from the political one represented by the contrast between the dictator and the clandestine group, to philosophical ones raised by Clicker's self-doubts. Its hybrid identity, that combines a human part with a mechanical one, makes it a cyborg and as Brian Stableford has underlined "the cyborg motif lends itself to use in existentialist *contes philosophiques* of a more intimate and inclusive kind than those featuring robots or aliens" (Stableford, 2006:115)

One of the main features of the story is the construction of Clicker's character, which has to express both its human and mechanical elements. Clicker's language plays an important role in this respect: the machine's speech is characterised by its simple, logical structure and some marked elements which reveal its technological origin. At the same time, Clicker uses metaphors in relation to itself, a rhetorical element that may be seen as linked to its human component.

The beginning of the story is particularly effective in communicating the machine's sense of identity. As it can be seen from the ST and TT below, Curtoni's translation remains very close to the structure of the ST, with most changes due to linguistic constraints, such as the omission of the first-person pronoun, not necessary in Italian. There are however a few lexical shifts, some of which are particularly significant. One is the replacement of "spire" with "torre" [tower] which introduces a different image and conveys a different meaning. While the term "spire" is perhaps more consistent with the conventional image of a "starship", the term "torre" evokes ideas of "strength" and, given its role in military context, ideas of "war" and "defence". Another interesting change is the translation of the compound "rainshroud", with the more dramatic "l'infuriare della pioggia" (the raging of the rain). These shifts alter slightly the tone of the initial section and introduce images of conflict and violence, foreshadowing the struggle(s) that will take place later in the story.

ST - I stand in the rain. Like a bright silver **spire**, I stand waiting in the rain for Teacher to come. The great concrete plain stretches about me on all sides to vanish in the gray torrent. But some of my senses can see beyond the **rainshroud**. A cluster of buildings nestles to the west, and a high wire fence divides the plain from the city on the north. The city is a place of the TwoLegs who are called "human", and the city is named Port e-Eridani VII. This is the place of my creation, but not the place of my purpose nor the place of my great happiness. The place of my happiness is the sky and beyond it to the star-flung blacknesses. I am XM-5-B, but Teacher calls me "Clicker." (Miller)

TT - Sono immobile nella pioggia. Come una **torre** d'argento luccicante, sono immobile nella pioggia e aspetto che arrivi Maestro. La grande pianura di cemento si stende attorno a me, da tutte le parti, per svanire nel torrente grigio. Ma alcuni dei miei sensi possono vedere oltre **l'infuriare della pioggia**. Una nube di edifici si alza ad occidente, e un grande recinto metallico divide la pianura dalla città, a nord. La città è un posto dei DueGambe che si chiamano «umani», e la città si chiama Port e-Eridani VII. Questo è il posto della mia creazione, ma non il posto del mio scopo e nemmeno il posto della mia immensa felicità. Il posto della mia felicità è il cielo, e oltre il cielo, nell'oscurità macchiata di stelle. Io sono XM-5-B, ma Maestro mi chiama «Aggeggio». (Curtoni, 1976)

The main struggle is that between Clicker and Basher, which plays out not only verbally but also physically. Basher is clearly a cruel and sadistic bully, a characterisation that in Italian ironically contrasts with its title of "Maestro", used to translate Teacher. "Maestro" is both the word used for primary school teachers and a term of deference. Slightly ironic is also the name "Aggeggio", used in Italian to render the name "Clicker". While "Clicker" appears as an appropriate nickname for a machine, since it seems to refer to some mechanical property, the Italian "aggeggio" seems almost derogatory as this word is used to refer to something, usually a tool, whose nature and function are not clear, highlighting the blurred identity of the machine.

This identity will become increasingly definite throughout the story, when both the machine's story and its fundamental humanity become clearer. An interesting feature of the Italian translation is the way in which the human element of the machine is intensified in a variety of ways. One is represented by the language used by Clicker. In the original story, Clicker's speech is clearly meant to represent how a machine would speak, as exemplified by the use of capital letters for certain

words¹⁶³ (Example 1 and 2), marked grammatical structures (Example 3 and 4), and unusual lexical choices (Example 5 and 6).

Example 1

ST- She cried, and it was a Pain sound

TT- Lei gridò, ed era un grido di Dolore

[She cried, and it was a cry of Pain]

Example 2

ST – I did not want her to feel Trouble

TT – Non volevo metterla nei guai

[I did not want to get her into trouble]

Example 3

ST – I felt shame-pain

TT – Mi sentivo morire di vergogna

[I felt I was dying of shame]

Example 4

ST – He tried to make **funny sayings**

TT – Cercava di **farla ridere**

[He tried to make her laugh]

Example 5

ST – She felt **avoidant** to him.

TT – Lei non era ben **predisposta** nei suoi confronti.

[She did not have a penchant towards him]

¹⁶³ Although these words occur in an oral context, their being written with a capital letter seems to signal that they are some sort of key words, perhaps part of the machine language programming.

Example 6

ST – Janna was **adient** to me

TT – Janna era **gentile** con me

[Janna was kind with me]

As it is clear from the TT renderings, the Italian is normalised in all these cases, resulting in a speech that is more idiomatic and typical of everyday language. This appears also in sentences that are not characterised by machine-speech features in the ST. In the following example (7), the slightly higher register of the ST, which may be deemed coherent with a ‘technical’ style, is rendered in Italian with a common expression used to convey confusion about oneself.

Example 7

ST – I fail to understand myself

TT – Non mi capisco

[I don’t understand myself]

It is not clear whether the ‘humanization’ of Clicker’s speech was a thought-out strategy, or the result of a structural simplification that is often found in translation. It is however worth noting that there is one translation mistake that is quite significant in this respect, and seems to reveal an underlying ideology (Example 8). The mistake occurs when Clicker tries to explain the reasons why Teacher hurt him. In this particular section, the computer reports a conversation between itself and Teacher, where the computer tries to establish the differences between itself and a human being. After Teacher explains them, the computer reaches the conclusion that its “capability for survival” is greater than that of human beings. Annoyed, Teacher punishes Clicker. In the ST, Clicker notes that the punishment ensues because Teacher does not like its questions and concludes that Teacher hurt it to stop its questions. In the TT, the translator seems to have mistaken “He hurt me” for “It hurt me”, hence a very different rendering which changes not only the meaning of Clicker’s sentence but perceptions about its identity. The “need to

ask questions” is something inherent to human nature and cannot be part of a computer programming.

Example 8

ST- He hurt me to block the questions

TT- Non porre le domande mi fa male

[Not asking questions hurts me]

That the Italian text offers a version of the story where Clicker is more human than in the original is also evident in another section, where Janna tries to persuade Clicker to land so she can warn the members of the group of the imminent raid. In the ST, Janna’s incomplete sentence is ambiguous and seems to question Clicker’s humanity; in the TT Clicker’s humanity is not questioned but represented as not complete.

Example 9

ST - If you were born a human, then...

TT- Se tu fossi un uomo del tutto, allora...

[If you were completely a man, then...]

- The representation of conflict in “I, dreamer”

“I, dreamer” is also a story dealing with conflict - a future one when Secon Samesh, the tyrant ruling Clicker’s world, will be able to invade the Earth, and a current one as the ‘regime’ is opposed by a clandestine group. The translation choices made to render these references tend to intensify them in a variety of ways.

I will quote two examples as particularly relevant. In the first example (Example 10) Clicker uses the conditional to describe the possibility of a future war. In Italian, the hypothetical period is rendered through the future and the present, which makes the war sound more imminent.

Example 10

ST - But the war would be in space, if it came, and there would be others like me –and I would cease to be alone. I hoped the war would come soon.

TT- Ma la guerra sarà nello spazio, se verrà, e ci saranno altri come me, e io smetterò di essere solo. Spero sempre che la guerra venga presto.

[But war will be in space, if it comes, and there will be others like me, and I will stop being alone. I always hope that war comes soon.]

Another example is the vocabulary used to describe the conflict with the clandestine group. In the passage where Basher, the Teacher, informs Janna that they are about to capture the clandestine group of which she is part, he says “the grove will be raided tonight”. This is rendered into Italian as “Stanotte rastrelleremo il bosco”, where the word “rastrellamento” evokes the violent raids against the population made by fascists and Nazis during the Second World War. A higher level of violence seems also to be expressed by the term “farla finita” to render “to be dealt with” in relation to the “traitors”. While “farla finita” can only mean “to put an end to something”, which in this context can only mean “death”, the English “to be dealt with” is vaguer and does not necessarily indicate that the “traitors” will be killed.

Example 11

ST - The miserable traitors have to be dealt with

TT - Dobbiamo farla finita con quei miserabili traditori

[We have got to put an end to those miserable traitors]

A similar violent ending is also implied in Italian by Basher’s words in relation to Janna, when she rejects him. While in English he just says that he’ll reveal her being part of the group, in Italian he says more ominously “Ti farò fare la stessa fine degli altri” [I will have you end up as the others], indicating that she will also be killed. The different treatment of “traitors” in Italian evokes more strongly ideas of war.

- Final remarks about the translation of “I, dreamer”

The translation of “I, dreamer” was published as a replacement for a short-story by Italian writer Lino Aldani, which could not be published because the author suddenly withdrew the text.¹⁶⁴ The same issue also featured “La morte e il senatore” (Death and the Senator, 1961) by Arthur C. Clarke, “Una notte” (The Night of the Nickel Beer, 1967) by Kris Neville, “Più in basso degli angeli” (Lower Than Angels, 1956) by Algis Budrys. In his editorial, Curtoni defines Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Sheckley as “mostri sacri”, that is to say “iconic figures”, with a clear ironic intention as he adds that he does not particularly like Clarke, while he criticizes Sheckley for not being as good as he used to be. There is also an oblique criticism of Aldani who was, at the time, perhaps the most important Italian SF writer.

Apart from the narratives, the issue also has a number of articles dealing with a variety of topic -, from the recurring section called “Ritratto d’autore” [Portrait of an author] which in this issue featured Arthur C. Clarke - to articles about classic science fiction themes, such as a piece about Superman and the translation of an article by Peter Weston about space travel, originally entitled “On the way to the Stars”¹⁶⁵. The two non-narrative pieces that stand out are an interview with writer Gordon Dickson who, amongst other things, talks about the difference between “ordinary SF” and “cutting-edge SF”, and an article written by Curtoni himself about Italian science fiction entitled “Fantascienza italiana ieri e oggi”. This article seems particularly important, as here Curtoni tries to identify distinguishing elements in Italian writing of SF which he mainly sees as “antropocentrica, soggettiva, indagatrice, piuttosto problematica” [anthropocentric, subjective, investigative, rather problematic] (Curtoni, 1976:116). In particular, he states how “Esiste un grande soggetto di fondo, che rispunta di continuo dalle pagine degli scrittori italiani: l’interesse per l’uomo e per i suoi problemi”. [There is a big underlying element, which springs up all the time from the pages of Italian writers: their interest

¹⁶⁴ In the editorial Curtoni explains that although Aldani had already handed in the manuscript, he later asked for it back as he had the opportunity to publish it with a more prestigious publisher.

¹⁶⁵ This was also part of series about classic themes in SF.

in man and his problems] (*Ibid.*). This evaluation is very interesting because Curtoni often uses the word “problemi” as a kind of benchmark signalling good science fiction. For example, he refers to the interest in “l’uomo e i suoi problemi” in his appraisal of “Canzone per Lya” [A Song for Lya] in issue eleven of February 1977. In other cases, he refers to the capacity of a story to evoke “i problemi di oggi”, as in his description of Brian Aldiss’ story “The Soft Predicament”, in issue 4 of July 1976, and Morena Medri’s “In morte di Aina”, issue 19, October 1977.

This “interest in man and his problems” highlights Curtoni’s ‘humanist’ perspective, his favouring science fiction that focuses on “human” problems, identity, love, death, communication, a preference that emerges both when stories are selected and when they are translated. In point of fact, as I have shown in my analysis, the translation of “I, dreamer” shows how the “human” element is emphasised in the story at several levels. The title itself points to this heightened present. While the original title, with its elliptical structure, is merely descriptive, the Italian rendering is much more evocative thanks to its open verbal structure. “Io sogno” [I dream] with its missing object refers to elements present in the text, such as Clicker’s desire to be human and the freedom from dictatorship wanted by Janna, but it can also evoke wider aspirations thanks to its structural proximity to other iconic sentences, like the Cartesian “Cogito ergo sum” or Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream”.

5.11 Comparative textual analysis of “A song for Lya”

The second story I have chosen to analyse is “A Song for Lya” by George R.R. Martin¹⁶⁶, originally published in the US magazine *Analog* in 1974 and featured in issue ten of *Robot*, in January 1977, with the title “Canzone per Lya” translated by Abramo Luraschi¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁶ George R.R. Martin would later become internationally famous thanks to his series of epic fantasy books *A Song of Ice and Fire* (from 1996), better known in its adaptation as the TV series *The Game of Thrones* (2011- current).

¹⁶⁷ Abramo Luraschi seems to have had an uneven career as a translator of science fiction. A search conducted on the Italian Opac listed only six titles under his name, only two of which were science fiction text.

The story focuses on two telepaths, Robb and Lya, who are lovers and work as officially recognised Telepathic Talents (PSI). They are called to the planet Shkea to solve a problem related to the alien inhabitants' strange religion, "The cult of the union", involving the acceptance of a parasitic form, the Greeshka, which attaches itself to someone's body and slowly consumes the host. To the human colonisers, this appears as a particularly incomprehensible and unpleasant form of suicide, especially since an increasing number of human beings also convert and die. Thus, the administrator of the human colony, Luca Valcarengi, calls Robb and Lya to investigate. They soon find out that the reason why the cult followers, called the Joined, agree to be eaten by the Greeshka is the overwhelming feeling of love and happiness that they feel when they accept the parasite which, in the end, leads them to the union with an immortal and universal communal mind. Lya herself is so attracted by the feeling of universal love and communion projected by the Joined that she chooses to die, while Robb chooses the loneliness and imperfection of humanity.

George R.R. Martin was, at the time, one of the new voices of science fiction, a talented writer who innovated conventional formula writing, blurring the border between genres by, for example, mixing elements of SF, fantasy and horror (Aldiss, 1988:451). "A Song for Lya" won the Hugo Award for best novella in 1975 and was subsequently included in many best-SF-anthologies. Thus, it is not surprising that Curtoni chose it for *Robot*, although there were also other reasons for his appreciation of the story. As he states in the editorial of issue 10 of *Robot*, March 1977, he "fell in love with the story" after reading it and he felt a sort of personal affinity with Martin, who he describes as "un tipo simpaticissimo, più o meno della mia età, che *sente* le cose allo stesso modo mio" [a very nice guy, roughly my age, who *feels* things the way I do]. This affinity was particularly evident in their shared vision of science fiction that favoured poetic and "humanistic" elements over technological ones. Curtoni also praises the story for its realistic characterisation and for being the kind of science fiction that "non rinuncia di parlare dell'uomo e dei suoi problemi" [does not refrain from talking about men and their problems] (*Ibid*).

The specific problem dealt with by the story concerns human beings' fundamental isolation and solitude, the impossibility of real and deep communication even among people like Lya and Robb who, as telepaths, can reach a level of sharing unimaginable for others. Hence the search for a higher level of existence, or the search for God as explained by Robb to Valcarenghi, after Lya has left him and joined the Greshka

Always people are **reaching for** something, for someone, searching. **Talk**, Talent, love, sex, it's all part of the same thing, the same search. And **gods**, too. Man invents gods because he's afraid of being alone, scared of an empty universe, scared of the darkling plain. That's why your men are converting, Dino, that's why people are going over. They've found God, or as much of a God as they're ever likely to find. The Union is a mass-mind, an immortal mass-mind, many in one, all love. (Martin, p. 208)¹⁶⁸

This key passage is rendered in Italian as

La gente sta sempre **anelando** a qualcosa, a qualcuno, cercando. **Conversazione**, Dote, amore, sesso, fa tutto parte della stessa cosa, della stessa ricerca. E anche le **divinità**. L'uomo inventa le divinità perché ha paura di essere solo, spaventato da un universo vuoto, spaventato della pianura oscura. Ecco perché i tuoi uomini si stanno convertendo Dino, ecco perché la gente passa dall'altra parte. Hanno trovato Dio, o almeno quel tanto di Dio che **sarà** mai possibile trovare. L'unione è una mente di massa, una mente di massa immortale, molte in una, tutto amore. (Martin/Luraschi, p. 108-109)

The translation maintains the surface structures of the original text as much as possible, modifying items only when linguistic constraints force the translator to find other solutions. This causes some questionable choices, such as the translation of "talk" with "conversazione", obviously chosen to keep the sequence of nouns as in the ST. However, the Italian word sounds odd as the idea conveyed by the English term is that of people looking for someone to talk to in general, not necessarily that of having the kind of structured verbal exchanges that the word "conversazione" suggests. When changes are made, these mostly originate from the impossibility of finding an Italian equivalent due, for example, to grammatical

¹⁶⁸ The examples from the source text are taken from the digital edition of George R.R. Martin's *Dreamsongs*, Vol. 1, published by Bantam Dell in 2007.

constraints. This is the case for the phrasal verb “to reach for”¹⁶⁹, rendered as the more poetic “anelare” [to yearn for] that shifts the meaning from “making an effort to obtain something” to the less dynamic “strongly wishing for something”. To be noted is also the translation of the phrase “darkling plain” as “pianura oscura”, conveying the meaning correctly from a semantic point of view but which loses the poetic connotation of the original phrase. The expression comes from Matthew Arnold’s famous poem “Dover Beach” (1851) and since the expression and the author are mentioned earlier in the text, the reader knows that the phrase has a literary origin. However, as neither Matthew Arnold nor the poem are very well known in Italy, the reference remains rather opaque.

The tendency to remain close to the source text characterizes the whole translation. Here is an example from the beginning of the text, describing the city of Shkea:

Example 1

ST - **That city had been ancient** in the days before Rome fell, had been huge and sprawling when Babylon was still a dream. But there was no **feel of age** to it. The human eye saw only miles and miles of low, red-brick domes; small hummocks of dried mud that covered the rolling hills like a **rash**.

TT - **Questa città era stata antica** nei giorni prima della caduta di Roma, era stata enorme ed estesa quando Babilonia era ancora un sogno. Ma in lei non c’era alcuna **sensazione di vecchiaia**. L’occhio umano vedeva soltanto chilometri e chilometri di basse cupole di mattoni rossi; piccole alture di fango disseccato che coprivano le colline ondulate come un **esantema**.

In this passage too the Italian text follows the source text fairly closely, with some changes due to linguistic constraints and target language stylistic conventions such as the preference for the demonstrative “questa” [this] instead of “that”, and the replacement of the verbal structure “before Rome fell” with a nominal structure “prima della caduta di Roma”. This rule, however, is not always applied, as the

¹⁶⁹ Phrasal verbs do not have an Italian grammatical equivalent and they are notoriously difficult to translate.

close rendering of “had been ancient” with “era stata antica” sounds marked in Italian. In other versions of this short story, this structure has been rendered with a more standard expression such as “era antica” (Valent and Lagomarsino, 2007:79) or “era già antica” (Rambelli, 1978:871). Further, the sentence “Ma in lei non c’era alcuna sensazione di vecchiaia” does not sound very natural in Italian, especially because of the unusual collocation “sensazione di vecchiaia”, and it appears as an attempt to render the relevant ST segment, “But there was no feel of age to it”, without changing it excessively.

In other cases, there are choices at odds with the overall character of the passage. In this segment, the word “esantema” employed to render “rash” seems to be out of place. The Italian word has a higher, technical register and may also be unclear for some readers as it is not commonly used in everyday language. In addition, it introduces a ‘wrong’ note in the description, as the word is typically used in ‘scientific’ texts and it clashes with the overall tone of the passage.

Inconsistencies of this kind are present throughout the translation and they may be an indication of the lack of a clear strategy on the part of the translator. In the following example, which was also taken from the initial part of the story, the city of Shkea is described in terms reminiscent of exotic places on Earth (Example 2):

Example 2

ST - Yet it was not a grim city. Day after day it squatted in those **scrubby** hills, broiling under **a hot sun** that sat in the sky like a weary orange melon; but the city teemed with life: smells of cooking, the sounds of laughter and talk and **children** running, the bustle and sweat of brickmen repairing the domes, the bells of the Joined ringing in the streets.

TT - Eppure non era una città sinistra. Giorno dopo giorno stava accovacciata in quelle colline **cespugliose**, arrostando sotto **un sole bollente** che stava nel cielo come uno stanco melone arancione; ma la città brulicava di vita: gli odori di cucina, i suoni delle risate e delle conversazioni e del correre dei **fanciulli**, il trambusto e il sudore dei muratori che riparavano le cupole, le campane dei Congiunti che risuonavano nelle strade.

The references to a “hot sun” and “scrubby hills” indicate that Shkea is an arid, desolate place. In Italian, this image is evoked by the translation of “hot sun” with “sole bollente” [boiling sun], but “colline cespugliose” [bushy hills] for “scrubby hills” is not entirely convincing as it evokes a greener landscape, not coherent with the idea of a very hot place. In addition, the translation of “children” as “fanciulli” gives the whole scene a target culture flavour. “Fanciulli” is a synonym of standard “bambini” but with a much higher register, usually associated with poetry and present in canonical texts of the Italian literary tradition.

From a thematic point of view, “A Song for Lya” effectively combines spiritual, romantic and existential themes, with some critics interpreting the story mainly in relation to its religious element, such as Ashley who states that “A Song for Lya’ is a study of the effect of an alien religion on colonists and goes to the heart of what constitutes faith” (2007:23). While this element was also acknowledged by Curtoni, since he includes Martin’s tale in a group of stories characterised by their desire for “transcendence” (October 1977), it is the romantic and sexual theme that seems to be especially highlighted in the Italian version. Curtoni himself singles out the last encounter between Robb and Lya as the defining moment of the story “Guardate, ad esempio, la delicatezza di quell’ultima notte d’amore fra Lya e Robb, il loro discorrere sul buio che avvolge gli essere umani” [Look, for instance, at the sweetness of Robb and Lya’s last night of love, their talking of the darkness that envelops human beings]. It should be noted how their being together is represented as a sort of defence against human isolation and existential anguish, as “il buio che avvolge gli esseri umani” is a metaphor clearly connected with and anticipating the theme of Arnold’s “darkling plain” that will emerge in the story.

Curtoni’s stress on the romantic aspect of the short story has corresponding elements in the translation. In the scenes where Robb and Lya make love, the Italian translation tends to use words that have a strong sexual connotation, although they are associated with different discourses about sexuality. This indicates uncertainty on the part of the translator on how to render sexual discourse. The following examples will illustrate this point.

Example 3

ST – Lya generally comes on as **impish and wicked** when she's **horny**

TT – Lya generalmente si rivela **maliziosa e peccaminosa** quando è in **vena**

[Lya generally shows herself as naughty and sinful when she is in the mood]

In Example 3, the slightly provocative idea of sexuality evoked by the adjectives “impish and wicked” used to describe Lya are rendered in Italian with “maliziosa e peccaminosa” [naughty and sinful] words that evoke a more negative idea of sex, particularly “peccaminoso” which deriving from the word “peccato” [sin] resonates with religious overtones. On the other hand, the word “horny” is toned down by way of the euphemistic “essere in vena” [to be in the mood], changing the image from that of a woman sexually excited to the stereotypical one of a woman being sexually unpredictable.

The difficulty of the translator in rendering the representation of female sexual desire can also be identified in the translation of “pleasure” with “godimento” (Example 4) and “her hunger” with “desiderio ardente” (Example 5). “Godimento” has a stronger sexual connotation than “pleasure” and is often used in erotic and pornographic discourse. The phrase “desiderio ardente”, while conveying the idea of “intense sexual desire”, has a very different connotation from “hunger”. The English word is consistent with a previous definition of Lya as a vampire, so that the word “hunger” can be intended as another manifestation of her intense and restless personality. The Italian expression, on the other hand, is more typical of cliché romantic discourse, thus rendering Lya a more conventional character. This tendency can also be detected in the translation of “raw red wave” as “rossa ondata selvaggia” (example 4), where “raw” conveys an idea of a painful and powerful feeling while “selvaggia” [wild] is a much more conventional word used in association with “sex”.

Example 4

ST – her **pleasure** washed over me in a **raw** red wave

TT – il suo **godimento** si rovesciò su di me come una rossa ondata **selvaggia**

[Her pleasure washed over me as a wild red wave]

Example 5

ST – I read her, briefly, and I read her pain, her sudden loneliness, her **hunger**, all aswirl in a darkening mind-storm of fear

TT – La lessi, brevemente, e lessi la sua sofferenza, la sua improvvisa solitudine, il suo **desiderio ardente**, tutto in un turbinare di oscura tempesta mentale di paura.

[I read her, briefly, and I read her pain, her sudden loneliness, her hot desire, all aswirl in a darkening mind-storm of fear]

In the last example (Example 6), Lya's desire of being deeply emotionally connected with Robb is simply rendered with an image of physical proximity "essere stretta" [to be held], which again conveys the idea of conventional romance.

Example 6

ST – I wanted **to be close** to you that way

TT – Volevo **essere stretta** a te in quel modo

An interesting aspect of the translation of this story is that it features two drawings by Giuseppe Festino, whose illustrations started to be included in the magazine from issue six of *Robot*. The two drawings, in black ink¹⁷⁰, appear on the title page of the story (p. 57) and a few pages before the end (p. 100), respectively. The first is clearly referred to Lya and Robb, as it depicts a man and a woman kissing, their bodies entwined, obviously engaged in lovemaking. Their heads are surrounded

¹⁷⁰ The inside illustrations by Giuseppe Festino published in *Robot* are all black and white drawings.

by what look like psychedelic waves, possibly meant to represent their telepathic union. The second drawing presumably represents the Joined, as it shows three people, one in the foreground and two in the background, wearing robes and clearly engaged in religious activity. The two figures in the background have their hands joined in prayer while the central figure represents a frail and emaciated man, looking heavenward, with something bulbous on his head presumably meant to represent the Greeshka.

Illustrations accompanying texts have been seen as forms of “intersemiotic translation” (Pereira, 2008), whereby a verbal system of signs is turned into a visual one. Pereira sees many similarities between the processes of verbal translation and visual translation, as both cannot translate the whole of the source text but need to select particular aspects of it. In addition, the strategies employed in the translation of verbal texts such as “addition, omission, explicitation, condensation and others that characterize verbal translation” (Pereira, 2008:107) can also be seen at work in illustrations. Festino’s drawings can thus be regarded as a form of visual translation that interprets the story on the basis of two selected elements: the emotional and physical union between Robb and Lya, and the spiritual search of the Joined. It must be noted that while the drawing with the man and the woman making love can be immediately related to specific scenes in the text, thus providing a visual interpretation of those scenes, the second drawing has a higher abstract dimension as it does not seem to correspond to a specific scene with the Joined. This must have been a specific choice by the artist, since he has stated that his drawings are based on his actual reading of the stories (Festino, UAU 3, 1978:28), rather than on information or instructions provided by the editor. The artist has also obviously chosen not to represent the most unpleasant aspects of the religion - even the bulbous growth on the head of the Joined is hardly recognizable as the Greeshka - and concentrate on its more spiritual aspects as the serene expression of the central figure suggests. Nonetheless, the drawing, the translation and Curtoni’s words in the editorial reinforce the idea of physical, romantic love as a defence against existential anguish, which is restated at the end of the story itself when Robb leaves Shkea on a starship, in the company of Lauren, Valcarenghi ex-fiancée. Their love-making and conversation echo not only Robb’s previous romantic encounters with Lya, but can also be related to Curtoni’s words

in the editorial, as the darkness mentioned by Robb has clearly a metaphorical value since the couple is travelling through space.

ST - Laurie Blackburn was on the ship with me. I ate with her after liftoff, and we spent the evening talking over wine. Not a happy conversation, maybe, but a human one. Both of us needed someone, and **we reached out**. Afterwards, I took her back to my cabin, and made love to her as **fiercely** as I could. Then, the darkness softened, we held each other and **talked away** the night.

TT - Laurie Blackburn era sulla nave con me. Mangiai con lei dopo il decollo, e passammo la serata conversando davanti a due bicchieri di vino. Forse non una conversazione felice, ma una conversazione umana. Ciascuno di noi aveva bisogno di qualcuno e ci **tendemmo le mani**. Più tardi la portai con me nella mia cabina e feci l'amore con lei, furiosamente quanto ne fui capace. Poi, attenuata l'oscurità, ci stringemmo fra le braccia e **consumammo** la notte parlando.

The Italian translation of this last scene strengthens the importance of human contact. Here the phrasal verb "reach out" is rendered with the expression "ci tendemmo le mani" [we stretched our hands towards each other] which highlights the idea of physical contact but also its metaphorical meaning of "helping someone in need". To be noted is also the translation of "talked away the night" with "consumammo la notte parlando", literally meaning "we wore out the night talking", where the choice of the more poetic verb "consumare" instead of standard "passare" emphasizes the idea of fighting the "darkness enveloping human beings" as Curtoni put it.

As I stated earlier, "Canzone per Lya" was especially appreciated by Vittorio Curtoni as it is part of a group of stories whose writers, according to him, share a desire for transcendence and are inspired by the wish "to build a new society, a new man, a new way to live in the world" (Curtoni, October 1977:4).

Part of this new world was also about a new attitude towards love and sexual relations that in Italy too had greatly changed, especially among young people, following the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s in the West. The conformism and censorship that had characterized attitudes towards sex in the previous decades had been contested in favour of sexual freedom and more genuine relations among

sexes. This revolution affected also science fiction, with writers who started to include explicit descriptions of sex in their work (Ashley, 2007:20-21). *Robot* published some stories with frank sexual references, some of which were Italian originals. Thus, it is perhaps not coincidental that in the same issue where “A Song for Lya” was published we find a long letter by well-known SF translator and editor Riccardo Valla¹⁷¹ defending the right of writers to describe sex scenes, while condemning the censorious attitude of a few years earlier, when publishers dictated “niente opere che parlino male dei preti, e soprattutto niente scene spinte, perché non vogliamo andare nelle grane” [no works that speak ill of priests, and above all, no explicit sexual scenes, as we don’t want any trouble] (Valla, *Robot* 10, January 1977:157). As a matter of fact, Valla starts with a defence of the short story “Circe” by Italian writer Mauro Miglieruolo that had been published in issue 3 of *Robot* and which had caused some debate among readers and other SF critics for its sexual content. In particular, the SF writer and editor Antonio Bellomi defined the story as “pornography”, as Curtoni reported in a piece published in the letters section of issue 5 of *Robot* (August 1976:9). Not only is “Circe” not pornography but, Valla states, the description of sexual experiences, acts and thoughts can lead to a better understanding of oneself (Valla, 1977: 157). Although sexuality was not a political theme in the narrower sense of the term, it was nonetheless important in the counterculture of the 1970s, particularly in the 1977 Movement that had rejected the older generation’s model of political activity focused on the public sphere and, following the feminist movement, gave priority to personal relations and the ‘private’ dimension in general (Lumley, 1990:298-300). Thus, by highlighting the importance of love and sex, *Robot* shows the influence of the counter-culture of the time, emerging from several discourses within the magazine, including translation.

5.12 Comparative textual analysis of “That Only a Mother”

The third case of comparative analysis focuses on the Italian translation of “That only a Mother” by Judith Merrill, which was originally published in 1948 in *Astounding Science Fiction*. The story is set in 1953, during a supposed Third

¹⁷¹ Riccardo Valla was a well-known translator, editor and critic of science fiction.

World War, and the fallout from nuclear weapons causes malformations and mutations in new-borns. Given the time of its publication, it had a clear cautionary role regarding the use of atomic weapons and, as a matter of fact, World War II itself is specifically mentioned, with a reference to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their effects on people. The conflict, however, remains in the background as the story focuses on Margaret, a pregnant woman, whose husband's work with nuclear material may have endangered the foetus. The story follows Margaret's pregnancy, her fear about the baby and her hope that everything will be fine in spite of hearing that the number of children with mutations is increasing. It is through her that we learn that the external world is not only a place of conflict but also a place of social and moral disorder, as the killing of mutant children by their own fathers goes unpunished. The baby is finally born and Margaret behaves as if all is well, although the reader understands through a number of hints that there may be problems. When the husband comes back from war, he and the readers finally learn the truth: the baby - who is incredibly precocious and can already talk like a four-year-old - has no arms and legs. The story ends with a strong hint that the father will kill the baby.

Although stories dealing with the effects of nuclear war had been published before, this tale was quite different because of its focus on a domestic setting, so much so that at the time of its publication it was criticised because it was not sufficiently technological and "for its absorption in the mundane realities of domesticity" (Evans et al, 2010:212). However, "That only a mother" would later be acknowledged as a classic of science fiction and would be included in major anthologies, such as *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One, 1929–1964*, edited by Robert Silverberg and published in 1970, and in *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction* (2010). It was under this classic status that it was published in *Robot*, as part of "I classici" section that included stories from well-known SF writers such as Arthur C. Clarke and Theodore Sturgeon.

As I said earlier, the story is usually interpreted as an anti-nuclear tale during the time of the Cold War, expressing a pacifist message against those "military practices "that "threaten to destroy the very families they are designed to protect" (Yazsek, 2004:70). However, as readers at *Locus* magazine put it, the story had

lost its impact by the 1970s, since the theme of nuclear annihilation and consequent mutations had become very common from the 1950s onwards (reader's comment in Straham, 2009). Therefore, it raises the question of why Curtoni picked this story, since its topic was not that original by this time and it had already been translated by Ugo Malaguti in 1971 and published in the magazine *Nova SF*. As a matter of fact, the four stories to be included in the "Classic section"¹⁷² had all appeared before in other magazines or book series, often just a few years prior to their publication in *Robot*. Apparently, they were not selected according to particular criteria but, as Curtoni states in the editorial of issue 14, May 1977, were chosen for purely subjective reasons (p. 2). Since he was not applying a long-term publication plan but following "his nose", as he puts it, it may be argued that contextual elements may have played a role. The publication of "That Only a Mother" seems to be a case in point as I will discuss in the next section.

The translation of "That Only a Mother" featured in the double issue of July/August 1978 with the title "Solo una madre" [Only a mother]. The story was translated by Paolo Busnelli who, after Abramo Luraschi, translated most stories for *Robot*. In the short Introduction to "That Only a Mother", Curtoni¹⁷³ lists the reasons why he selected this particular story by Judith Merrill. After noting her key role as the editor of revolutionary anthologies, he praises the stylistic quality of her writing, especially for "la grande attenzione per la trama del linguaggio e la squisita, delicatissima sensibilità femminile" [her great attention for the fabric of language and her exquisite, very delicate woman's sensitivity] (Curtoni, 1978:74). He then notes how, in spite of the time that had passed since its publication, the story was still topical. This statement is not very clear, since while there certainly was a widespread awareness of the dangers represented by the use of nuclear devices, it was only in 1979 that the anti-nuclear movement was revived in Italy and elsewhere, after

¹⁷² The "classic" section starts with Fritz Leiber's "A Bad Day for Sales" (1953) published in issue 14 of May 1977, translated as "Brutta giornata per gli affari" by Gabriele Tamburini, and continues with Arthur C. Clarke's "Expedition to Earth/History Lesson" (1949) published in the June 1977 issue (No 15) as "Spedizione sulla Terra" also translated by Gabriele Tamburini, and "Consider Her Ways" (1956) by John Wyndham published in Issue 27 of June 1978 and translated as "Considera le sue vie" by Paolo Busnelli. "That Only a Mother" was the fourth and final classic story to be published in *Robot*.

¹⁷³ Curtoni wrote all the Introductions to the "classic stories", apart from the one for "Consider Her Ways" which was written by Giuseppe Lippi.

the Three Mile Island accident in the US in 1979. It is much more likely that Curtoni was thinking of the Seveso disaster, when on 10th July 1976 a reactor exploded in a chemical factory in Seveso, in the Milan area, releasing dioxin in the atmosphere and severely affecting people and animals. Great alarm was raised about the possibility that the gas would affect pregnant women, causing the birth of children with malformations, so much so that although abortion was illegal, the government allowed the interruption of pregnancy on therapeutic grounds. The whole question became highly controversial, inserting itself in the wider debate about abortion that was taking place at the time in the country, as progressive groups, especially women's groups, were campaigning to repeal the legislation that criminalised the interruption of pregnancy¹⁷⁴.

At a more personal level, the whole issue represented a lacerating moral dilemma for the "Seveso women", many of them devout Catholics (Mariotti, 2016). Considering this context, it is clear how "That Only a Mother" could represent a fictional terrain within which to explore these difficult issues, albeit dislocated in another place and time. The key issue considered by the story is that of "motherhood", especially, as Curtoni states in his brief introduction to the story, "l'amore materno visto come forza che supera ogni barriera, che va addirittura oltre la realtà per creare un mondo immaginario, idilliaco" [maternal love seen as a force that overcomes every barrier, which goes even beyond reality to create an imaginary, idyllic world]. It is however a form of blind love that, while impressive, is incapable of facing reality. Margaret is a character that inspires compassion rather than admiration as her hope of having a baby without genetic mutations turns into a denial of reality. In addition, the narrative structure of the story raises doubts as regards Margaret's awareness of the situation. While the initial and final parts of the story are told by an omniscient narrator, the central part is narrated through a series of letters that Margaret sends to her husband. These letters represent a crucial part of the story, as it is through them that we learn of the birth of the baby and Margaret's utter delight with this. It's through her direct voice that we hear her assurances to her husband that the baby is fine, but it is also at this point that the reader (and probably her husband) starts to suspect that something is not quite

¹⁷⁴ The legislation was abandoned after a referendum in May 1978.

right, turning Margaret's voice into that of an unreliable narrator. There are, sometimes, hints that Margaret is not so unaware as she seems to be, for example when she tries to stop her husband from changing the baby's nappy as he will inevitably find out the baby's malformations. As I will demonstrate in the following comparative analysis of the source text and target text, the issue of Margaret's 'unawareness' is strengthened in the Italian text together with positive representations of "motherhood" and "fatherhood".

As was the case with the other two translations, Busnelli's version of "That Only a Mother" is syntactically and semantically very close to the source text, showing here too several instances of markedness. For example, when in the ST it is stated that Margaret is a "city-bred woman", Busnelli renders this as "una donna allevata in città", translating literally the verb to breed as "allevare", which, however, tends to collocate with animals or children in Italian (Example 1).

Example 1

ST - The air smelled the fresher, to a city-**bred** woman

TT - L'aria sembrava più fresca, per una donna **allevata** in città

[The air seemed fresher, for a woman bred in the city] (p. 77)

In another segment (Example 2) the expression "the plate glass walls" is rendered as "I muri di lastre di vetro", instead of the more idiomatic "vetrate". This choice not only is unidiomatic but is not coherent with the noun chosen to render "joint". While in English a "hamburger joint" refers to a proper building, a "chiosco" is a simple stall, usually associated with the sale of newspapers or street food, and would not have "glass plates".

Example 2

ST – She walked the six blocks to work, watching the lights go out in the all-night **hamburger joints**, where the **plate glass walls** were already catching the sun.

TT – Percorse a piedi i sei isolati fino al posto di lavoro, guardando le luci spegnersi nei **chioschi di hamburger** aperti tutta la notte, dove i **muri in lastre di vetro** stavano già cogliendo i primi raggi del sole. (p. 77)

This means that, as in the other cases, changes that are not prompted by linguistic or cultural constraints probably have an ideological basis. This is particularly evident in the part where Margaret writes about the infanticide of the deformed babies, committed by the fathers who, as the ST states, are not condemned by juries. (Example 3).

Example 3

ST – More infanticides all the time, and **they can't seem to get a jury to convict any of them. It's the fathers who do it.**

TT – Ci sono sempre più infanticidi, e **nessuno viene condannato. In genere sono i padri a commetterli.** (p. 77-78)

[There are more and more infanticides and nobody is sentenced. Generally, it's the fathers who do them]

The Italian translation makes important alterations whose aim seem to be that of toning down the negative representation of fathers in the text. The first one occurs in the rendering of the structure “they can't seem to get a jury to convict any of them” which in Italian becomes “nessuno viene condannato”, a weaker and more general statement, for it implies that other people may be responsible of the infanticides. This idea is strengthened in the following sentence as the Italian translation of “It's the fathers who do it” is softened thanks to the introduction of the frequency adverb “in genere” [generally], suggesting again that other people may have committed the killing.

Another intervention of this kind, which results in a less negative representation of the father, is also present at the end of the story when Margaret's husband, Hank, realizes the extent of the child's mutations and, as the text implies, is going to kill it (Example 4). In the source text, the whole sequence is slightly depersonalized since, while there is some reference to the man's thoughts with the words “Oh God, dear God”, the main focus is on his actions, with the repetition of the possessive

adjective “his” creating a sort of tense rhythm and cohesion between the man’s actions and the object of his actions. The translation introduces a more personal element by inserting the man’s name, Hank, thus reducing the distance between the man and the reader. A connection is created between the phrases “beyond control” and “limbless body” which have both been rendered in Italian by the same adjective “prive” [without], somewhat reducing the man’s responsibility for these actions as not having control over one’s limbs is equated to not having them. Finally, the loss of the possessive adjective “his” in the translation, which is typical in standard Italian, weakens the connection between the father and his actions, as the referent of “his” is only implied rather than explicitly stated.

Example 4

ST – His hands, beyond control, ran up and down the soft-skinned baby body, the sinuous, limbless body. *Oh God, dear God* – his head shook and his muscles contracted in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child.

TT – Le mani di Hank, prive di controllo, corsero su e giù per il morbido corpo infantile, il sinuoso corpo privo di arti. *Oh Dio, buon Dio...* La testa si scosse e i muscoli si contrassero in un amaro spasimo di isterismo. Le dita si strinsero sulla bambina. (p. 83)

[Hank’s hands, without control, ran up and down the soft baby body, the sinuous body without limbs. *Oh God, good God*. The head shook and the muscles contracted in a bitter spasm of hysteria. The fingers tightened on the baby girl.]

Another instance of ideological interference on the part of the translator is represented by the way in which the idea of maternal devotion is strengthened. As I stated earlier, it is not clear to what extent Margaret is aware of the baby’s problems since the source text seems to be occasionally ambiguous regarding this issue. For example, in the following passage the omniscient narrator uses a modal structure with “would” to describe Margaret’s reaction to a situation of tension, raising the doubt that Margaret’s apparent obliviousness is intentional. (Example 5)

Example 5

ST - “What’s the matter?” Hank’s voice was still casual, but an undercurrent in it began to charge the air of the room. “I thought they turned over first”. “This baby” – **Margaret would not notice the tension** – “*This* baby does things when she wants to.”

TT – “Come mai?”. La voce di Hank era ancora distesa, ma un poco di tensione cominciava a caricare l’aria. “Pensavo che imparassero prima a girarsi”. “Questa bambina”, **Margaret non si accorgeva della tensione**, “*questa* fa le cose quando ne ha voglia”. (p. 82)

In the Italian translation, however, this ambiguity disappears as the English segment is translated with an imperfect tense that does not have the same nuance, so Margaret’s ‘innocence’ is reaffirmed. This construction of motherhood is coherent with the Italian title, which is slightly different from the English one. In the source text “That only a mother” evokes the saying “A face that only a mother could love” which foreshadows the content of the story, creating a sense of suspense about who or what is the creature “that only a mother could love”. Since in Italian there is no such saying, the relative pronoun was eliminated, so the title was turned into “Solo una madre” [Only a mother]. This rendering changes the focus of the story, narrowing it on the idea of motherhood, and particularly on the idea of “heroic motherhood” as the suspended structure of the phrase “solo una madre” invites completion with words about the exceptionality of maternal love.

The Italian version then presents Margaret as an example of maternal devotion and is coherent with the title in its re-orientation of the story, embedding it into the target text’s system of values as idealised motherhood is a pillar of Italian culture.

- Final remarks about the translation of “That Only a Mother”

Considering that one of the main elements of 1970s counter-culture was the destruction of the traditional family, it may seem strange that the Italian version of “That Only a Mother” strengthens notions of parenthood, representing them in a less negative way than the original. This is perhaps due to a certain ambiguity that can be found in *Robot* in relation to some issues, and to the fact that, after all, the

main purpose of the magazine was a cultural rather than a political one. For example, as I mentioned earlier, *Robot* explicitly supported women's science fiction but was less appreciative towards more extreme forms of feminist SF (section 7). The issue where Merrill's story was published, which was also the last one edited by Vittorio Curtoni, is a case in point. Apart from Merrill's story, it contains another six stories translated from English, two of them by women, "La cittadella delle navi perdute" by Leigh Brackett and "Bruma, Erba e Sabbia" by Vonda McIntyre¹⁷⁵, as well as a story in Italian by Gianluigi Zuddas. The editorial focuses on the changes that *Robot* will introduce starting from the following issue, the fact that it will have the format of an anthology with the consequent reduction of the informative section. The only comment Curtoni makes on the narrative material in the current issue is to praise the quantity and quality of it. In spite of its apparent lack of a specific focus, this issue seems somehow concerned with women. Not only does it contain three stories written by women but some of the non-fiction pieces also focus on women, although in different ways and without much coherence between them. The main non-fiction article deals with *Starcrash* (1978), an SF movie made in Italy and directed by Luigi Cozzi. The film is a space opera, imitative of the well-known *Star Wars* (1977), and features a female protagonist whose character, dressed in a bikini costume and knee-high boots, appears both on the cover and in the inside pages, an image that is more in tune with the sexualized representation of women typical of pulp science fiction. Next to the image, among the list of contents of the magazine the words "Il futuro del sesso" [The future of sex] seems to refer to the image of the space heroine, although, in fact, it is the title of a translated text by SF author Katherine McKlean arguing for equality between men and women while inviting readers to abandon "primitive pleasures", i.e. men's attraction to violence and women's love for male protection.

Yet another representation of 'femininity' is offered in the letters section, where reader Anna Sulli responds to Curtoni's frequent demands for readers' opinions with a long and well-argued letter entitled "Lettori silenziosi e politica" [Silent readers and politics] (p. 203-5) where she highlights Curtoni's contradictory

¹⁷⁵ The two stories are the translation of, respectively, "Citadel of Lost Ships" (1943) and "Of Mist, of Grass and Sand" (1973).

statements about science fiction and politics and states her own belief in freedom of speech. Sulli notes how Curtoni criticises editors and publishers who do not express a political position, i.e. for their “qualunquismo” but, at the same time, he criticises those who do express a political view different from his own, such as right-wing editors and publishers. Quoting Voltaire, the reader declares herself a communist although one who will defend other people’s right to express their ideas, even if abhorrent, otherwise “ricadiamo, anche noi, nell’eterna arroganza di voler imporre agli altri la nostra visione” [we also fall into the eternal arrogance of imposing our vision on other people]. As an example of the dangers of imposing one own’s vision on other people, she mentions the influence of Catholicism on Italian life, which she sees as responsible for Italy’s cultural backwardness, mentioning the question of abortion as an example. The second part of the letter questions Curtoni’s description of science fiction in terms of its political content as, according to the reader, the quality of the text is more important than its political content which, in any case, most people do not care about as SF is read primarily for entertainment. In his reply Curtoni, while agreeing on the importance of free speech, restates the importance of a political ‘reading’ of science fiction: “Io sono di sinistra – io leggo fantascienza – io cerco di capire e d’interpretare la fantascienza da un punto di vista di sinistra” [I am left-wing – I read science fiction – I try to understand and interpret science fiction from a left-wing point of view] (Curtoni, *Robot* 28/29, July/August 1978:206). In addition, he rejects the idea of SF as pure escapism, asserting that while entertainment is important, this cannot be separated from a connection with reality as “che razza di ‘evasione ad alto livello’ sarebbe, comunque, una narrativa che ti estrania dal tuo mondo, dai tuoi problemi?” [what kind of ‘high level escapism’ is fiction which detaches you from your world, from your problems?] (*Ibid.*). With this answer, Curtoni once again states his belief in science fiction as a critical tool of reality.

5.13 Conclusions

This chapter examined the approach to the translation of science fiction as it was expressed in two SF magazine published in the 1970s, *Robot* and *Un’Ambigua Utopia*, which were characterized by their left-wing positioning. *UAU*, in particular, was close to the values of the “Movimento del ‘77” and had a stronger militant

aspect. *Robot*'s political commitment was less explicit than *UAU* but, interestingly, its source-oriented translations seem to have had an implicit 'moral' dimension as opposed to the 'deceptive' translations published by *Urania*, which was berated by Curtoni for its lack of political commitment. Producing visible faithful translations was then a way of expressing the mediators' honesty and political engagement.

The chapter has also analysed the translations published in *Robot* in relation to their connection with how these stories contributed to the overall discourse of the magazine, and how, while being close translations of the ST, they sometimes showed significant shifts that could be connected to the cultural climate and events of the time but also to more traditional target culture values. Particularly interesting was the discourse around women's science fiction, that was brought to the fore both in relation to the narratives and the non-fiction material. While the magazine increased the publication of SF written by women, the representation of womanhood was sometimes contradictory and ambiguous.

CONCLUSION

Informed by an interdisciplinary framework that draws on Translation Studies, Popular Fiction Studies and Italian Studies, the aim of this thesis has been to examine the role of translation in constructing images of science fiction in Italy between the 1950s and 1970s. The study has focused on a number of key texts, book series, anthologies and magazines, that proved to be particularly interesting in providing data about the aesthetic, poetological and ideological elements that influenced the actions of the agents of mediation, as well as the changing textual practices associated with the translation of popular fiction.

In this thesis, I have shown how translation was used differently by the various individuals and groups involved in the transfer of Anglo-American science fiction during the considered time span. These differences were partly due to changes in the perception of translation as a textual practice, as strongly domesticating interventions gave way to less manipulative ways of dealing with imported texts. We have seen, for example, how, for the mediators of *Urania*, translation was a tool to be used ruthlessly to mould the source texts into something that, while partly preserving the novelty of the STs, could be acceptable both in terms of the mediators' ideas of science fiction and the expectations of the potential readership. In particular, I suggested that the mediators reproduced, through translation, an idea of science fiction with porous borders, linked to genres such as the gothic and the adventure novel, so that readers could rely on familiar references. This was especially evident through the analysis of the titles of the *Urania* book series and the *Urania* magazine, which showed the extensive use of key words associated with the above-mentioned genres.

The sensationalist tone of the *Urania* translations was abandoned by the editors and translators of the Einaudi anthology, *Le meraviglie del possibile*. Now the frame of reference became the Anglo-American literary canon and, especially, its utopian tradition. Careful textual selection and translation choices all contributed to give shape to the editors' idea of what science fiction should and could be: a means to question the kind of world that was emerging from the ashes of the Second World War and which could be even more destructive than the war itself. Issues of

acceptability were also present. In fact, for the message of the anthology to be effectively conveyed, it was essential that target readers accepted the texts as legitimate literature. In my discussion, I demonstrated how this was achieved, both at the paratextual and textual level. In relation to the former, the anthology was presented through the 'packaging' conventions of 'serious' literature, replicating to a certain extent Einaudi's trademark sophisticated white covers. At the textual level, the translations were often characterised by a higher, literary register and lexical choices that evoked references to classical literature.

As I discussed in Chapter IV, the sophisticated presentational strategy initiated by the Einaudi anthology became widespread in the 1970s, when different agents of mediation used paratextual elements to position science fiction alongside mainstream literature. As I argued, the covers of the hardbound series published by Libra, Nord and Fanucci were akin to statements that redesigned the borders of the genre and its relationship with other popular narratives, as well as with high literature. The label "traduzione integrale" [unabridged translation], in particular, had several functions. It differentiated the new agents of mediation from those who used manipulative approaches, as in the *Urania* translations; it enhanced the cultural status of science fiction since, traditionally, the demand for textual integrity had been applied to 'serious' literature; it opened a dialogic element on the cover, where a sort of 'implied translator' invited potential readers to trust the claim of the label.

The use of translation to negotiate a particular notion of science fiction was again at the centre of the magazine *Robot* which, as I showed, positioned itself at the junction between traditional fandom activities and 1970s political activism. The production of 'faithful' translations was not just a response to changing trends in the translation of literature and popular fiction. In the case of *Robot*, translation was used 'politically' to counter the manipulative practices of other publishers and, by doing so, also to highlight their questionable politics. Texts showed minimal interference as the mediators became guarantors of textual integrity, through a number of strategies that included placing the original titles and the translated titles side by side on the back cover of the magazine.

The analysis of the different strategies used by editors and translators has highlighted their agency in adopting the 'rules' that better fit their agenda. This was made possible by the extent of their control on the production of science fiction: from the selection of the texts to be translated, to their actual translation, to editing, to their presentation in book series and magazines, these mediators could shape the genre any way they wanted, also facilitated by the frequent conflation of different roles (publisher, editor, translator and author) into one figure. This confirms that, as Milton and Bandia state, far from being the passive receivers of overarching 'norms', mediators can contribute to "the maintenance and perhaps the creation of norms" (Milton and Bandia, 2009:8) themselves. This seems particularly true in the field of popular fiction, where hardly any control derives from official cultural institutions, thus giving free rein to the mediators to shape the product as they wish.

In fact, a form of control does exist, but it comes from within the SF community, by the receivers of the texts. As I have discussed in Chapter I (1.2.3), one of the peculiarities of science fiction as a genre is the development of the so-called fandom, readers strongly engaged with the texts whose actions may have an impact on how SF is produced. In relation to the Italian case, it is clear that the first objections to the way in which texts were translated in book series such as *Urania* o *I romanzi del cosmo* came from former fan readers who had, at some point, become editors, critics, translators and authors of science fiction¹⁷⁶ and were in a position to modify the translation approach adopted by other mediators. Even these new agents, however, had to relate to readers who, in turn, had a 'proprietary' attitude toward science fiction and expressed their own opinion about a number of issues - ranging from the texts selected for publication to how they were translated. In relation to the latter, fans always seem to object when they perceive that texts are not faithfully translated, even where the interventions are minimal. This attitude sheds light on aspects of the fan subculture that would come to the fore in later years, when with the Internet virtual communities would be created around a particular genre, text, author etc. Studies of these communities have shown that,

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, Cersosimo's essay (2002) about the development of the SF fandom in Italy from which it is clear that most editors and critics mentioned in this thesis come from the world of fandom.

in the case of mediated texts, fans are very active in preserving the integrity of the texts they love, for example by producing their own, usually more faithful, translations when the official versions are somehow lacking (O'Hagan, 2009:100).

As Ellen Carter has noted, studies on the translation of popular fiction tend to “coalesce” into four main topics: the role played by translated popular fiction in popularizing a specific genre into a country, the study of translated popular fiction as a means of investigating sociocultural and political aspects of the country in which it is produced, the study of textual features and fictional translation (Carter, 2018:433). In this project, I have tried to deal with two of these, the relationship between the translated texts and their sociocultural context and the detection of particular translation trends.

Regarding the first objective, this thesis has clearly shown how the study of translated popular fiction can offer a valid contribution towards a better understanding of the issues and cultural climate that characterise particular historical periods. From this perspective, one of the most interesting elements to emerge from this thesis is the way in which the analysis of *Le meraviglie del possibile* indicated that translations were a response to the fear of modernity exacerbated by the transformations that occurred after the Second World War. As shown in the texts I examined, this anthology can be considered as a document representing the mood of Italian society at a particular point in time, thus contributing to the knowledge of Italian history and culture.

With regard to the second aspect, I did not find any evidence towards specific trends: the translation of popular fiction is not characterised by an overall target-oriented or source-oriented approach. The picture that emerged points, rather, to different approaches adopted by different agents, in particular historical periods and contexts for specific purposes. This feature was highlighted by my comparative analyses of different versions of the same text produced at different times. For example, the translations published in *Robot* that I reviewed in Chapter V were compared with other versions of the same stories published in later years. These subsequent translations revealed different types of interventions that point at particular agendas on the part of the translator or the publisher. For example, an

Italian version of “That Only a Mother” published in 1990 by Mondadori, as part of a collection of women’s science fiction, shows translation choices that are the opposite of the strategy employed by the *Robot’s* translator, as they emphasize a negative representation of men.

Even the tendency to produce source-oriented translations, that characterised the 1970s production, was not an established trend. In this respect, one of the most striking cases was the translation of “A Song for Lya” by George R.R. Martin, published in 2007 by Mondadori in a collection entitled “Le torri di cenere”. By 2007, George R.R. Martin was already a very well-known writer, thanks to the success of his series “A Song of Ice and Fire”¹⁷⁷. Given the author’s visibility and status, it was logical to expect a translation close to the source text. Instead, the Italian version showed several omissions as well as lexical and structural choices that tended to standardise the text, heightening its readability but also reducing its stylistic specificity.

The need to compare a great number of original texts with their translations has also highlighted some methodological problems that are perhaps more evident in the study of popular fiction, as seriality is a typical feature of the field. This aspect had already been foregrounded by Ken Gelder, when he noted that “Popular fiction writers can indeed be incredibly prolific, churning out one, two, three or more novels a year and maintaining their output over long periods of time” (Gelder, 2004:15). Carter also commented on this aspect, suggesting a way forward when she stated that

Given that sales of popular fiction dwarf those of literary fiction in the number of novels published and translated, as well as in the total volume of books sold, the quantitative approaches of digital humanities seem a natural fit. (Carter, 2018:439)

¹⁷⁷ By the time the Mondadori collection was published, George R.R. Martin was already a well-known fantasy fiction writer whose series *A Song of Ice and Fire* was about to be turned into a TV series by HBO as he reveals in his blog entry of 17th January 2007 (<https://grrm.livejournal.com/11326.html>). Only four years later, he would be included in the *Time* magazine list of the 100 most influential people in the world for 2011 (Hodgman, 2011)

While this approach has not been used in this thesis, the study of electronically stored corpora of popular texts may certainly be a direction for future research.

In relation to this project, textual comparisons have been manually made when I had to deal with relatively small corpora, such as the examination of the thirty translations published in *Le meraviglie del possibile* and the one hundred translations published in *Robot*. In other cases, when the corpus consisted of a large number of texts, such as the *Urania* bookseries and those published by Nord, Libra and Fanucci, I opted for an analysis of their paratextual elements. While the latter have now become widely employed in the field of translation studies for different types of texts, they seem particularly productive for the analysis of popular genres, as they can help to identify which notions of “genre identity” are at work at a particular point in time. As I have shown in my analysis of the book covers of publishers Nord, Libra and Fanucci, shifts in the composition of titles and in the choice of the illustrative material provided data on which ideas of science fiction different mediators wanted to advertise, how they positioned their products in relation to each other and the Italian literary system and also the extent to which the titles’ structure reflected overall trends in comparison with other genres. Paratexts provided information also in relation to their market destination as conventional markers of genre identity were enhanced for the books sold at newsagents’.

The findings and issues I have discussed above indicate that the study of translated popular fiction can be very useful in elucidating the complex network of social and cultural features that govern the production of marginalised cultural forms, as well as the power relations between the different human agents involved in such production. In addition, the thesis has shown how translated popular texts may be particularly effective at intercepting the mood of a time, indicating another possible route of analysis together with the study of indigenous popular texts (see, for example, Camilletti’s study of occultism in 1960s Italy).

I would like to note that when I started this project, the term “translation of popular fiction” never appeared as the title or heading in any book related to the discipline of translation studies. There were studies on specific popular genres in relation to

different national cultures, literary traditions and historical periods, but “popular fiction” was subsumed within the general area of translation studies. In the last few years, however, there has been growing interest in this area of research, with special issues of journals and events dedicated to the translation of popular fiction. For example, the *Journal of Specialised Translation JoSTrans* has devoted an entire issue to the topic of *Crime in translation*, (Issue 22, July 2014, K. Seago, J. Evans and B. R. de Céspedes Eds.), while a special issue of the journal *Perspective* centres on the analysis of translated popular fiction (Bianchi and Zanettin, 2018). A recent entry about “Translating popular fiction” by Ellen Carter in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Culture* indicates its emergence as a specific area of investigation within Translation Studies. With this study, I hope I have made a contribution to this new field of study within the area of translation.

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Appendix I – *Le meraviglie del possibile* (1959) – Source Texts and Target Texts

1897	H.G. Wells - <i>The Crystal Egg</i>	L'uovo di cristallo (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1950	E. Van Vogt - <i>Enchanted Village</i> (alternative title: "The Sands of Mars")	Villaggio Incantato ¹⁷⁸ (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1950	Ray Bradbury - <i>Death-by-Rain</i> (alternative title "The Long Rain")	Pioggia senza fine ¹⁷⁹ (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1954	Fredric Brown – <i>Sentry</i>	Sentinella ¹⁸⁰ (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1953	Margaret St Clair- <i>Prott</i>	Prott (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1950	Frank M. Robinson – <i>The Maze</i>	Il labirinto (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1956	Clifford Simak – <i>Mirage</i> (alternative title: "Seven came back")	Miraggio (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1944	Fredric Brown - <i>Arena</i>	Il duello ¹⁸¹ (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1954	William Tenn – <i>Party of the Two Parts</i>	Il doppio criminale (tr. Floriana Bossi)
1953	Philip K. Dick – <i>Impostor</i>	Impostore (tr. Floriana Bossi)
1951	Katherine McLean- <i>Pictures Don't Lie</i>	Le immagini non mentono (tr. Maria Giunti)
1951	Fredric Brown – <i>Man of distinction</i>	Un uomo esemplare (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1950	Fredric Brown – <i>The last Martian</i>	L'ultimo dei marziani

¹⁷⁸ Previously published in 1954, as an addition to Urania 49, "Avventura su Marte", tr. G. Monicelli.

¹⁷⁹ Previously published as "La pioggia che uccide" in 1950 in *Select 2*, Editrice Mediolanum, and subsequently as "Pioggia senza fine" in 1954 as an addition to Urania 37, *L'uomo che non poteva morire*, tr. G. Monicelli.

¹⁸⁰ Previously published as "Avamposto sul pianeta X" in 1955 as an addition to Urania 75, *Operazione Centauro*, tr. Anon.

¹⁸¹ Previously published as "Arena" in 1959 as an addition to Cosmo 31, *L'uomo telecibernetico* Ponzoni Editore, tr. Anon.

		(tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1952	Walter M. Miller Jr - <i>Dumb Waiter</i>	Servocittà (tr. Gilberto Tofano)
1957	Isaac Asimov – <i>Feeling of Power</i>	Nove volte sette (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1951	Isaac Asimov – <i>Satisfaction guaranteed</i>	Consolazione garantita (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1956	Richard Matheson– <i>Steel</i>	Acciaio (tr. Franco Lucentini)
1953	Lion Miller- <i>The Available Data on the Worp Reaction</i>	I dati disponibili sulla Reazione Worp (tr. Bruno Fonzi)
1955	William Tenn – <i>The Discovery of Morniel Mathaway</i>	La scoperta di Morniel Mathaway (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1948	H. Beam Piper – <i>He walked around the horses</i>	Passò intorno ai cavalli (tr. Bruno Fonzi)
1941	Robert Heinlein - <i>...and he built a crooked house</i>	La casa nuova (tr. Giorgio Monicelli)
1952	Robert Sheckley - <i>Cost of living</i>	Il costo della vita ¹⁸² (tr. Gilberto Tofano)
1953	Robert Sheckley – <i>Seventh Victim</i>	La settima vittima ¹⁸³ (tr. Gilberto Tofano)
1954	Richard Matheson - <i>The test</i>	L'esame ¹⁸⁴ (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1950	Ray Bradbury - <i>The Veldt</i> (The World the Children Made)	Il Veldt (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1959	Daniel Keyes – <i>Flowers for Algernoon</i>	Fiori per Algernoon (tr. Carlo Fruttero)

¹⁸² Previously published as “Carovita” in 1954 as an addition to *Urania* 57, *L'Ordine e le Stelle*, tr. Anon.

¹⁸³ Previously published as “Vittima N.7” in 1958 in *Galaxy* Anno I-N. 4, tr. Isabella Spelta. Editrice Due Mondi.

¹⁸⁴ Previously published as “L'ultima prova” in 1957 in *Visto* Anno VI n. 52, tr. Giorgio Monicelli

1952	Arthur C. Clarke – <i>The Nine Billion Names of God</i>	I nove miliardi di nomi di Dio ¹⁸⁵ (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1959	Charles F. Obstbaum – <i>The historical case of Lieutenant Herzog</i>	L'affare Herzog (tr. Carlo Fruttero)
1947	Ray Bradbury – <i>Zero Hour</i>	Ora zero ¹⁸⁶ (tr. Carlo Fruttero)

¹⁸⁵ Previously published as “Operazione Shangri-La” in 1954 in *Visto* Anno III n. 17, tr. Giorgio Monicelli

¹⁸⁶ Previously published as L'ora x” in 1958 as an addition to *Cosmo 9, Il libro di Ptath*. tr. Anon. Ponzoni Editore.