

# Science fiction, cultural industrialization and the translation of techno-science in post-World War II Italy

**Giulia Iannuzzi**

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy [giannuzzi@units.it](mailto:giannuzzi@units.it)

**Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice**

ISSN: 0907-676X (Print) 1747-6623 (Online)

Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmps20>

**To cite this article:** Giulia Iannuzzi (2018): Science fiction, cultural industrialization and the translation of techno-science in post-World War II Italy, *Perspectives*, DOI: 10.1080/0907676X.2018.1496461

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2018.1496461>

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 January 2017 Accepted 1 July 2018 Published online: 23 Jul 2018.

## **KEYWORDS**

science fiction translation; publishers' cultural agency; paratext; adaptation

## **ABSTRACT**

A wave of translations of Anglo-American science fiction characterized the Italian publishing market during the years of the 'economic miracle' (1950s–1960s). Starting from an assessment of quantitative data about science fiction novels published in specialized series, the article discusses the agency of publishers and editors in shaping and marketing ideas of genre, in terms of selection of texts to be translated, adaptation through the paratextual apparatus and translation strategies. Translations in popular series were in fact characterized by a vast range of domestication and manipulation phenomena. A close reading of a number of cases reveals a complex series of motives at work behind these practices: from the adaptation to a readership younger than the original one – and/or believed by the publishers to be less culturally prepared – to economic factors, as the physical characteristics of each book were strictly standardized, and issues of cost and seriality often took precedence over artistic considerations.

Presentation of new worlds involves new words  
(Stockwell, 2000, p. 113)

## Science fiction in/and translation

For a genre in which language plays such a distinctive role – in the form of neologisms, neosemes and invented languages; techno-scientific and pseudo-scientific vocabulary; as well as metalinguistic reflection and fictional images of translation processes – relatively little research has been done on the translation of science fiction texts.

While some attention has been devoted to language and translation in science fiction, and more precisely to issues such as genre reading protocols related to linguistics and to fictional languages, to neologisms and their contribution to the creation of science fictional nova<sup>1</sup> (Barnes, 1975; Bould, 2009; Csicsery-Ronay, 2008, pp. 13–46; Conley & Cain, 2006; Delany, 1984; Meyers, 1980; Shippey, 2005) and to the theme of translation and communication with other species and civilizations (Cronin, 2009, pp. 108–133; Delabastita, 2009, pp. 110–111; Mossop, 1996; Wozniak, 2014a), much less critical attention has been devoted to science fiction in translation. A handful of studies are available on the translation and cultural transfer of Anglo-American science fiction literature in non-English-speaking countries (Bianchi, 2015, *in press*; Gouanvic, 1997, 1999; Iannuzzi, 2014b; Sohár, 1999, 2000), as well as on the dubbing and subtitling of science fiction television series and films (Iannuzzi, 2014c; Wozniak, 2014b), while broader geographical and chronological areas interested by the circulation of science fiction across cultural-linguistic borders and across media offer promising territories for further research.

The hegemonic position of Anglophone countries in enabling the emergence and development of science fiction as a recognizable label on the global publishing market (Csicsery-Ronay, 2012), as well as in shaping the field of science fiction studies (e.g. Chronological bibliography, *n.d.*; A history of science fiction criticism, 1999; Science Fiction Studies, 1996; SFS showcase, 2010) partly explains why the thriving, interdisciplinary field of research and teaching that is science fiction studies remains largely based in English language countries, where the majority of special collections and archives, graduate and doctoral programs, academic associations, journals and conferences is to be currently found. Comparative approaches in science fiction studies have focused primarily – and fostered some remarkable scholarship – on comparisons between authors, works, themes, media, alongside important historical reconstructions, often leaving aside linguistic areas other than English and translation issues, with a few notable exceptions.

In recent years, increasing attention towards the lively literary productions coming from different languages, as well as towards the transnational nature of the genre repertoire shared by authors and readers across national cultures, has inspired expanding intersections between science fiction and post-colonial studies, and the development of new approaches to global science fiction and science fiction translations. Of particular note are the special issues appearing in *Science Fiction Studies*, without doubt one of the most important scholarly journals in the field, including those on global science fiction (1999–2000), science fiction and globalization (2012), and Japanese (2002), Latin America (2007), Chinese (2013) and Italian (2015) science fiction; the growth of the international section of the academic programme within World conventions (annual conventions of the World Science Fiction Society); and an increased trend on the part of Clute, Langford and Nicholls' *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* towards a global perspective, with the inclusion of numerous entries on non-English speaking countries and authors (Clute, Langford, Nicholls, n.d).

When it comes to the Italian context, a history of science fiction and a critical assessment of the role of science fiction translations cannot be written without taking into account the peculiar history of the genre in Italy – as I shall explain in the pages that follow – and the critical issue of its lack of visibility: university courses in Italian and comparative literature usually do not comprise works of science fiction, as only a few scholars of Anglo-American literature and language have begun to include science fiction texts in their undergraduate courses since the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

The present study aims to offer a critical assessment of the wave of science fiction translations that characterized the Italian publishing market during the years of the 'economic miracle', i.e. the prolonged period of strong economic growth that characterized Italy in the post-war years, locating this production as part of broader cultural dynamics. The agency of publishers and editors in shaping and marketing ideas of genre and in adapting original texts through paratexts and translation practices will also be analysed in connection with the birth of new segments of readership, the Anglo-American cultural world of the period, and the hopes and fears of modernity that shaped how the genre was received by Italian intellectuals.

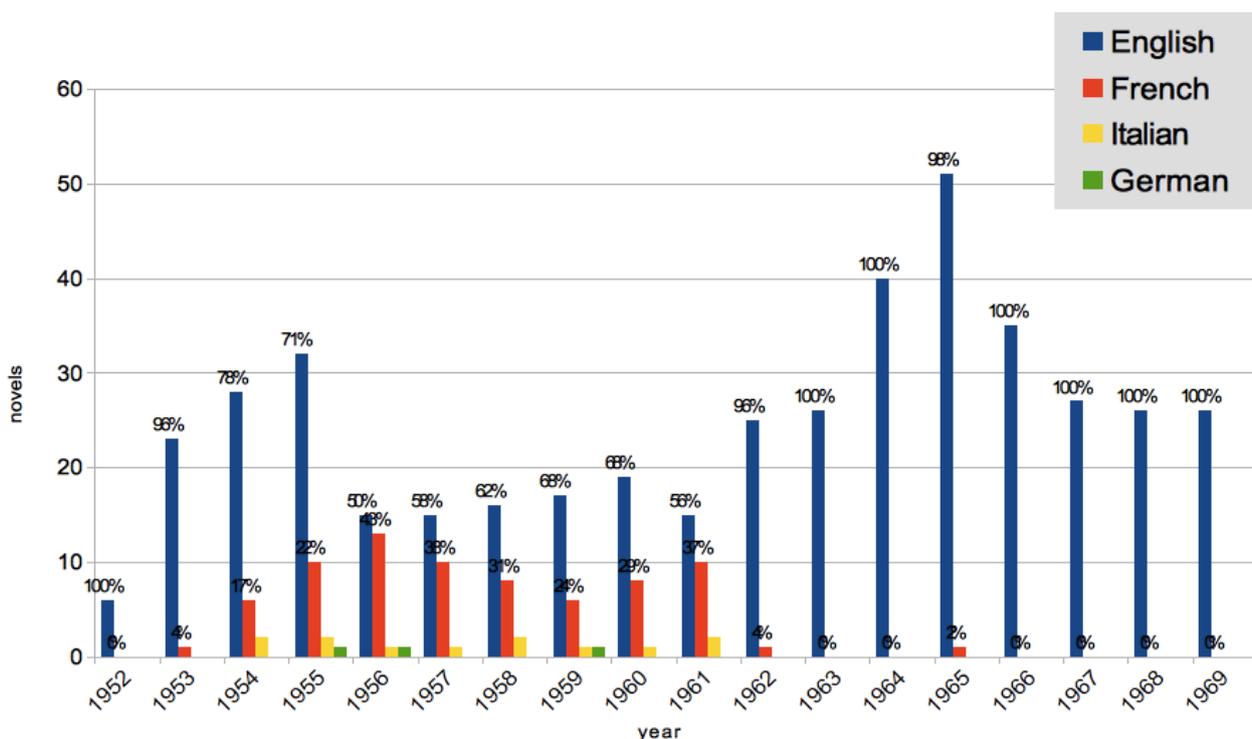
## **Flying saucers in post-World War II Italy: the translation phenomenon**

While in the English-speaking world science fiction had been defined as a specific genre, with important founding fathers who were part of the main literary canon (e.g. H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe) and marked by the development of specialized pulp magazines, particularly those on the US market from the late 1920s, in Italy the publishing label *fantascienza* did not appear until some 30 years later, in 1952, in the

blurb of the translation of *The Sands of Mars* by Arthur C. Clarke, published in *I Romanzi di Urania*, 1, 10 October 1952 (as *Le sabbie di Marte*).<sup>3</sup> In fact, it was not before the ‘economic miracle’ of the 1950s and 1960s that the Italian cultural industry also experienced a boom and, like in the US, paperback novels and news stand series gained mass-market circulation.<sup>4</sup> In this thrilling phase of tumultuous changes in cultural habits, when new readerships were beginning to emerge,<sup>5</sup> and, for the first time, people could afford a weekly comic book, magazine or cinema ticket, science fiction appeared in the form of an impressive wave of translations from English.

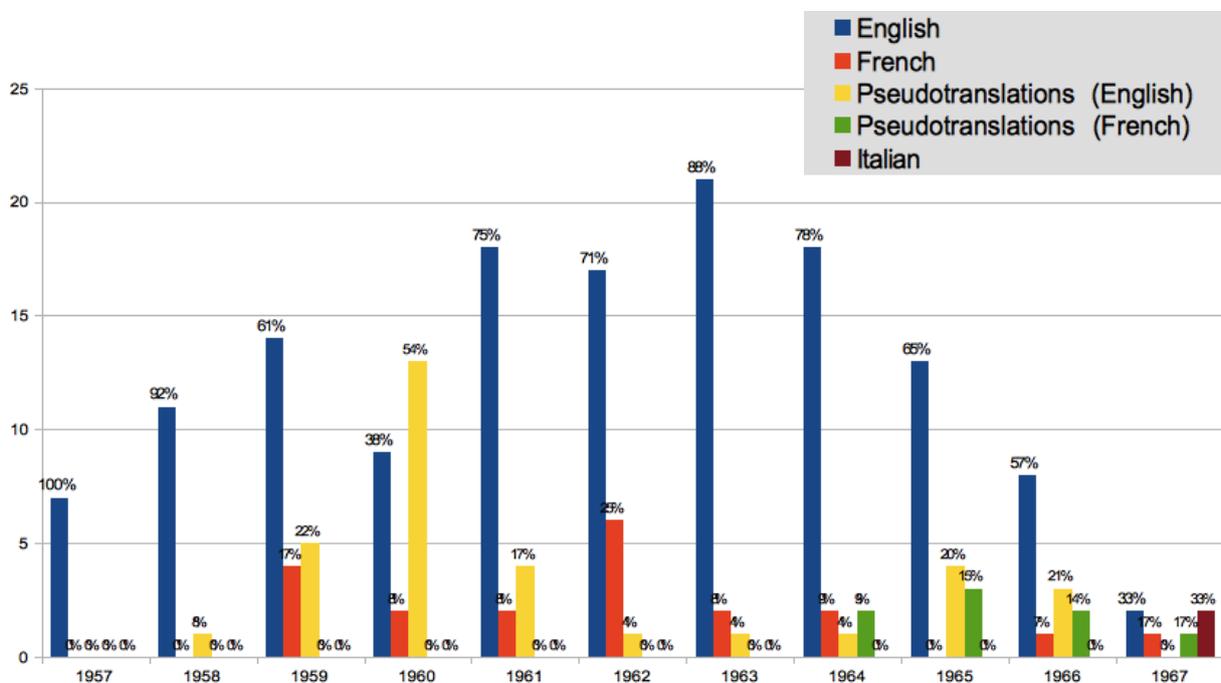
The first and most popular Italian science fiction magazine to be sold cheaply from news stands was *I Romanzi di Urania*. Since its appearance in 1952 and until the end of the 1960s, the magazine predominantly published translations from English. The first 267 issues included only 11 complete novels by Italian authors, while 74 novels were translations of French novels, as shown in [Figure 1](#). These novels, which originally appeared in the book collection *Anticipation*, published by Fleuve Noir, were issued mainly between 1954 and 1961, under the editorship of Giorgio Monicelli, who was a translator from French as well as from English, and collaborated with Maria Teresa Maglione, a translator from French. During the same years, translations from English amounted to around 68%, a percentage that went up to almost 100% in the following decade, as [Figure 1](#) illustrates, under the editorship of Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, who looked up to the Anglo-American tradition as the undisputed trendsetter in the genre (Iannuzzi, 2014a, pp. 23–42, 58–78) ([Figure 1](#)).

**Figure 1. Urania (1952-running). Original language of novels featured, 1952–1969 (267 issues)**



The main competitor of *I Romanzi di Urania* during the same period was called *I Romanzi del Cosmo*, and in 1957 the entirety of its contents were translations from English. This trend would continue in the following years, translations from English maintaining a share of between 32% and 92% of all novels published, as [Figure 2](#) makes clear. From 1958, the series increasingly featured Italian authors, cultivating the systematic use of English pseudonyms and of pseudotranslations, as shown in [Figure 2](#) (Milton, 2000; Sohár, 2000; Sohár, 1999, esp. pp. 178 and ff.). For *I Romanzi del Cosmo*, Luigi Naviglio wrote under the name of Louise Navire; Giancarlo Ottani under the name of John Ott; Gianfranco Briatore as John Bree or F. R. Tarrobie; Roberta Rambelli as Robert Rainbell, Joe C. Karpati or Hunk Hanover; Ugo Malaguti as Hugh Maylon; Pasquale de Quattro as P. D. Four; and so on. Sometimes the real name of the Italian author was indicated before the title page, disguised as a – fictitious – translator. In 1954, pseudotranslations from English accounted for more than 50% of the content published, while Italian names would not appear on the cover until 1967, the last year of the series' life ([Figure 2](#)).

**Figure 2. *I Romanzi del Cosmo* (1957–1967, 202 issues). Original language of translations and pseudotranslations**



Of course, there was more to the translation phenomenon than the percentage of translated novels and short stories mentioned above: the publishing formulas adopted

by the main Italian companies publishing science fiction stories in their specialized collections, including Mondadori (I Romanzi di Urania and later derivative series), La Tribuna (Galaxy, Galassia, SF Book club) and Ponzoni (I Romanzi del Cosmo), were based on those of overseas publications, whose publishing formats and forms were imported along with the texts to be translated (Antonello, 2008; Iannuzzi, 2014a, pp. 23–42).

Indeed, it should come as no surprise that the Italian word *fantascienza* (initially hyphenated: ‘fanta-scienza’) was coined by Monicelli as a calque of the English science fiction. The first Italian authors to try their hands at the new genre had to quickly assimilate a whole new repertoire of themes, tropes and generic conventions (Iannuzzi, 2014a, 2015), while the publishers’ agency was most certainly crucial to the widespread use of English (rather than French) pseudonyms and pseudotranslations. While it was cheaper to publish works written by little-known Italian authors than to buy translation rights of famous foreign titles, science fiction had quickly become synonymous with foreign names, in a circle of mutual influences between publisher projects and reader expectations that would prove very difficult to change, and which left Italian authors on the margins of the genre. Popular overseas themes were rapidly adopted by Italian authors, who soon moved from an imitation of the English texts (e.g. the novels published under English pseudonyms in collections such as *I Romanzi del Cosmo*, 1957–1967) to original reworkings of foreign models. These Italian science fiction works were, for example, published in *Futuro*, 1963–1964, which mainly focused on dystopias and psychological explorations, and in a few other magazines and series that offered important spaces for experimentation to Italian voices. Such publications included *Galassia* (1961–1979), *Oltre il Cielo* (1957–1970, 1975), *Nova Sf\** (1967–1980) and *Robot* (1976–1979), while *Gamma* (1965–1968) was among the first to publish critical essays.

The success of the genre was significantly favoured by the presence of American science fiction on the Italian big screens: the 1950s were not only the golden age of the genre in US cinemas, but also a time of massive importation of American films into Italy, as the protectionism that had characterized the film industry under the fascist regime, when import- ing foreign material was restricted by the Monopoly law of 1938 and the Alfieri law of 1939 (Toffetti, 2003), came to an end. During the 1950s the share of US films in Italian cinemas accounted for over 50% of total programming, a feat achieved with the support of the Motion Picture Export Association of America (Bafile, 1986; Wagstaff, 1999). Science fiction classics such as *The day the earth stood still* (dir. Robert Wise, 1951), *Creature from the black lagoon* (dir. Jack Arnold, 1954), *Forbidden planet* (dir. Fred M. Wilcox, 1956) and *Invasion of the body snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel, 1956) fostered a swift popularization of the genre. As for the small screen, the 1950s saw the appearance of a whole succession of science fiction television series, which were sometimes translated into Italian dubbed versions were usually aired years

later and without consistency with the episodes' original airing order. Official broadcasting by the national Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) began in 1954, and in its early years the Programma Nazionale channel (later known as RAI 1, the only channel available until 1961) favoured generalist programs. While *Captain Midnight* (1954) was aired starting in May 1956, episodes of other American science fiction series and serials, such as *Buck Rogers* (1950–1951) and *Flash Gordon* (1954–1955), and of anthological science fiction dramas such as *Science Fiction Theatre* (1955–1957) and *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964), would not be shown in Italy until the 1980s, and then only incompletely. The same applies to *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–1969), aired by Tele Monte Carlo ten years after it was first broadcast in the United States.

The synergic role played by cinema is a reminder of how important it is to place and critically assess the translation phenomenon within a wider historical and cultural context, without which it is impossible to understand the prominent role of translations from English. The relatively limited amount of Italian science fiction forerunners and pioneers during the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century (de Turris, 2001; Foni, 2007) is not enough in itself to explain the extent of the Anglo-American 'phenomenon' and its enduring influence, unless this is considered in connection with wider socio-economic developments. These might include a slower Italian industrial development compared to England and America, where scientific research and development supplied the popular scientific-technological imagery that gave science fiction its 'raw materials'; the toll that World War II took on the Italian publishing industry; and the strong influence of the US on Italian life during the years of the Marshall Plan, together with the role of the US in the global economy and the political situation after the war.

Interestingly, while American science fiction publications also dominated other European countries during the same period (James, 1994, ch. 2), in Italy specific cultural circumstances contributed to putting the new genre at a disadvantage: on the one hand the intellectual scene was considerably influenced by Benedetto Croce's idealistic philosophy and tended to penalize popular narrative genres, looking down upon the hard sciences and technology as second-class forms of knowledge; on the other hand, Marxist criticism was sceptical about a narrative form perceived as yet another product of American cultural colonization.<sup>6</sup>

The uneasy relationship between the humanities and techno-science that characterized Italian culture in the twentieth century influenced the translation of science fiction – a genre strongly characterized (if not defined) by the connection between its thematic and rhetoric repertoire and techno-science.

## Do judge a book by its cover: adaptation of paratextual elements

Certain phenomena typical of the translation of science fiction texts in the early years are good indications of how the first Italian editors and publishers conceptualized the genre while making use of the science fiction label, of how they positioned it in the Italian market, and of the way they perceived the potential Italian readership.

For any Italian reader taking a glance at the publications available from the news stands of the day, the 1950s and 1960s were a time of adventurous science fiction, mostly translated from youth-oriented US pulp magazines rather than from more mature and sophisticated publications of the same period, such as Horace Gold's *Galaxy*. Whether the texts were translations of contemporary or historical English originals or pseudotranslations, the paratextual elements appealed to a techno-driven sense of wonder, highlighting the most entertaining aspects of the genre. Space rockets and stations, monstrous aliens and scantily dressed women astronauts stood out on the covers of specialized series, often looking midway between a periodical – sold at news stands at an affordable price – and a mass-market paperback – usually featuring a complete novel and some extra material in each issue. Magazines featuring short stories, essays and columns, such as *Gamma* and *Nova Sf\** were exceptions to the prevailing model, while it was not until the 1970s that science fiction books appeared in Italian bookshops, issued by a new generation of specialized publishers such as Fanucci and Nord.

During the very first years of its life, *Urania* had very few competitors: the first one was *Scienza Fantastica: Avventure nello spazio tempo e dimensione* [Fantastic Science: Adventures in Space Time and Dimension], created and edited in Rome by Vittorio Kramer and Lionello Torossi, seven issues of which appeared between April 1952 and 1953, featuring translations of English short stories both from anthologies of the day and from the US magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*. *Scienza fantastica* also offers an interesting example of an alternative translation of the term 'science fiction', over which the word *fantascienza*, established by *Urania*, prevailed. The months from August to October 1952 also saw the appearance of six issues of *Mondi nuovi: Quindicinale di avventure nello spazio* [New Worlds: A Biweekly Magazine of Space Adventures], edited by Eggardo Beltrametti, devoted to science fiction comics and narratives written by Italian authors under English-sounding pseudonyms. After 1953 and before 1957, very few attempts were made to challenge the supremacy of *Urania*: one big publishing house, Garzanti, launched *Fantascienza* in 1954 – an Italian version of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* – but only seven issues came out: perhaps this was due to the fact that the short-story formula it used was too sophisticated for early Italian readers. However, the disappearance of *Fantascienza* probably had more to do with a general reorganization of the Garzanti periodicals, which also meant, for instance, that the Italian version of *The Ellery Queen Mystery*

Maga- zine was no longer published. Between the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s science fiction news stand publications experienced a kind of ‘boom’ of their own, favoured by a new interest in space technology and fuelled by milestone moments on the space race, such as the first Sputnik satellite, which was launched in 1957, and Yuri Gagarin’s flight, which took place in 1961. A whole mass of new publications appeared, which were often short-lived once the initial appeal was over.<sup>7</sup> The content of these publications was prevalently provided by Italian authors under foreign pseudonyms, along with translations from English and sometimes from French, with a preference for juveniles, i.e. works ‘written with a specifically juvenile audience in mind’ (Nicholls & Langford, 2015).

Together with *Urania* and *I Romanzi del Cosmo*, the magazine *Oltre il Cielo* [Beyond the Sky] managed to survive longer than most. Edited in Rome by Armando Silvestri (1957– 1970, 1975), it was the most Gernsbackian<sup>8</sup> of the Italian magazines, with a pivotal role in the promotion of Italian authors, who began using their real names. Another survivor was *Galaxy*, the Italian version of the US namesake, which from 1958 to 1964 brought to Italy the first translations of social science fiction, especially under the editing of Roberta Rambelli (1961–1965). *Galaxy*’s offspring, *Galassia*, which first appeared in 1961, would continue to be published until 1979, and, especially under the guidance of editors and translators Vittorio Curtoni and Gianni Montanari, would present Italian readers with authors such as John Brunner, Samuel Delany, Roger Zelazny and Harlan Ellison, usually associated with the ‘New Wave’ school of science fiction. These writers had been neglected by *Urania* as they were perceived as too sophisticated for their readership during the same years. *Galassia* also differed from *Urania* by publishing more complete and accurate translations and showing overall higher editorial care. Nevertheless, *Urania* continued to reign supreme during that period: sales of *I Romanzi del Cosmo*, *Urania*’s main competitor and imitator in terms of editorial formula and price range, remained at around 12,000 copies per issue, half that of Mondadori’s series, while *Oltre il Cielo* sold around 18,000 per issue, that is around 60–70% of its print run (Iannuzzi, 2014a, pp. 91, 123). The examples dis- cussed below have been chosen to highlight the central role played by the Mondadori series – *I Romanzi di Urania* – in familiarizing a mass public with the genre repertoire.

It is worth taking a look at the titles shown in [Table 1](#) (see also Bianchi, 2015, esp. pp. 231–232) ([Table 1](#)).

While on more than one occasion titles are translated literally (see issues 1, 6, 9, and 19) or undergo minimal changes that do not affect the literal meaning or connotations of the original (11, 15), we more often find obvious adaptations. In particular, changes include the highlighting of adventurous elements (14) and of elements typical of the science fiction (5, 10, 16) or

fantastic (17) genre, the addition of a dark edge or a reference to crime, horror and mysterious elements (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 20), and/or simplifications, such as the preference for concrete elements over abstract ones (10, 12, 13, 18).

**Table 1. Titles of science fiction novels published in Urania, issues 1–20 (editor: Giorgio Monicelli).**

Urania issue	Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
1 (1952)	The Sands of Mars (1951, Arthur Clarke)	Le sabbie di Marte	The Sands of Mars
2 (1952)	Marooned on Mars, (1952, Lester Del Rey)	Il clandestino dell'astronave	Stowaway on the Spaceship
3 (1952)	The Day of The Triffids (1951, John Wyndham)	L'orrenda invasione	The Dreadful Invasion
4 (1952)	Darker Than You Think (1949, Jack Williamson)	Il figlio della notte	Night's Child
5 (1952)	The Puppet Masters (1951, Robert A. Heinlein)	Il terrore dalla sesta luna	The Terror of the Sixth Moon
6 (1952)	The Legion of Space (1947, Jack Williamson)	La legione dello spazio	The Legion of Space
7 (1953)	Sinister Barrier (1943, Eric Frank Russell)	Schiavi degli invisibili	Slave of the Invisibles
8 (1953)	Slan (1946, A. E. Van Vogt)	Il segreto degli Slan	Slans' Secret
9 (1953)	The Four Sided Triangle (1949, William F. Temple)	Il triangolo quadrilatero	The Four-Sided Triangle
10 (1953)	The World of Ä (1945, A. E. Van Vogt)	Anno 2650	Year 2650
11 (1953)	The Dreaming Jewels (1950, Theodore Sturgeon)	Cristalli sognanti	Dreaming Crystals
12 (1953)	The Weapon Shops of Isher (1951, A. E. Van Vogt)	Le armi di Isher	Isher's Weapons
13 (1953)	Genus Homo (1950, L. Sprague De Camp, P. Schuyler Miller)	Gorilla Sapiens	Gorilla Sapiens
14 (1953)	The Star Kings (1949, Edmond Hamilton)	Guerra nella Galassia	War in the Galaxy
15 (1953)	Beyond This Horizon, 1942, Robert A. Heinlein)	Oltre l'orizzonte	Beyond the Horizon
16 (1953)	Dreadful Sanctuary (1951, Eric Frank Russell)	Il pianeta maledetto	Cursed Planet
17 (1953)	The Weapon Makers (1952, A. E. Van Vogt)	Hedrock l'immortale	Hedrock the Immortal
18 (1953)	City (1952, Clifford D. Simak)	Anni senza fine	Endless Years
19 (1953)	Prelude to Space (1951, Arthur C. Clarke)	Preludio allo spazio	Prelude to Space
20 (1953)	Pebble in the Sky (1950, Isaac Asimov)	Pària dei cieli	Pariah of the Skies

The covers of the texts published during those years were usually signed by Kurt Caesar, a technical designer and comics artist (see Zanettin, 2017), whose detailed and brightly coloured drawings gave science fiction publications the visual representation that characterized it for the first generation of Italian readers. The subjects of the illustrations indicate choices similar to those seen at work in the titles: Caesar's drawings are sometimes merely adaptations of the illustrations in the original US or UK editions (e.g. 2), but often depict subjects more clearly marked by generic elements (e.g. a city under a glass dome on a desert planet instead of the landscape and planet void of humans that illustrated the English original edition in 1); or by references to Anglo-American settings (e.g. the Big Bang, 3). In these choices we recognize distinctive features of the genre, which were sometimes favoured over a reference to the specific content of a given novel, thus pointing to the preference for the staple characteristics of the genre over authorship and/or creative uniqueness.

Blurbs were not signed, but Monicelli style is quite noticeable. He was responsible for the whole editing process of the publication, assisted only by his secretary and copy editor, Andreina Negretti. The Italian blurbs sometimes took inspiration from the original editions, as in the case of the first Italian translation of Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers*, published in Urania in 1956 under the title *Gli invasati* [The Possessed] (Finney, 1955). The blurb starts as a translation but soon moves into new territory, full of the heroic pioneering spirit that made Monicelli's style unmistakable in the blurb of the Italian edition (Finney, 1955), the Italian editor adds a reference to a specific character (Ira), and replaces California with a more generic, explicative phrase ('a small town in the West of the United States'), then turns the mysterious case to be solved into an apocalyptic situation, with an emphatic announcement: 'L'invasione era cominciata!' ('the invasion had begun!') and, using a quasi-*Lovecraftian* image, makes references to the evil, obscure and ancient forces coming from the depths of space.

The cover, illustrated by Caesar, was a remake of the American cover, illustrated by John McDermott, with a few small but significant changes to the scene: on the Italian cover the woman rescued by the protagonist is fully dressed (while in the original she is in a nightgown, with bare arms and legs), and the scene is taking place in the countryside, where a cactus adds some American exoticism, inspired perhaps by the typical setting of a Western film.

## The shrinking translation: what was under surveillance and why

The translations for *Urania* were usually either carried out by Monicelli himself or entrusted to translators who were just beginning to learn their craft and would later move on to more prestigious (and financially rewarding) undertakings. However, compared to other series published by Mondadori using similar formulas, such as crime novels, the budget for translations and copy editing of *Urania* was very low.

The translations were often characterized by mistakes, sloppiness and missing cultural adaptations (Leppihalme, 2011, p. 129), such as the literal translations of idioms for which a semantic equivalence was needed, or the use of the Italian ‘voi’ (the polite second person pronoun, nowadays substituted by ‘lei’), which resulted in the portrayal of a different type of relationship between characters. Simplification phenomena were especially frequent, including imprecisions and the omission of lexical nuances, as well as diaphasic and diastratic varieties of the language. The cuts also affected rhetorical expressions and figures of speech, altering the author’s original style.

In addition, major omissions included monologues and descriptions if they contained no essential information to the plot developments. The plot itself could undergo significant changes, with the elimination of references to sex, as in Matheson’s 1956 novel *The Shrinking Man*. These could affect only minor allusions or whole scenes, and even almost entire chapters. In fact, Italian readers of *The Shrinking Man* – published under the witty title of *Tre millimetri al giorno* [Three Millimeters a Day] ended up reading a completely different novel; as in other cases, later translations, as well as later reprints by Mondadori, would carefully restore all the omitted parts (Iannuzzi 2014c).

Omissions were particularly common in the case of techno-scientific elements, and of more ‘learned’ passages considered too sophisticated and/or potentially boring for *Urania*’s readers. One example is the translation of Hal Clement’s *Needle* (Clement, 1950) from which entire paragraphs were expunged in the Italian version, containing descriptions of space objects and phenomena, spaceships and technical details, and so on. This was controversial in some instances, e.g. after the first translation of Arthur Clarke’s *The City and the Stars* (Clarke, 1956) the author demanded a new,

unabridged edition, while the text that had been published under the title *Fanteria della Galassia* [Troopers of the Galaxy] was hardly recognizable as Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (Heinlein, 1959).

Thanks to the testimonies of translators and copy editors, it is apparent that these kinds of omissions were informed by specific cultural attitudes: sexual allusions, for example, were deemed inappropriate for the young readers of the series. Andreina Negretti's policy of editing out such allusions was well-known to translators submitting their work for publication in *Urania*, to the point of causing instances of self-censorship. More generally, it was considered that science fiction literature had to be entertaining and gripping, but not too demanding in terms of scientific knowledge, even when this meant dispossessing 'science fiction' of the 'science' part of the term.

Aside from the need to vary the range of science fiction sub-genres in the series, the main criteria used in the selection process was a novel's suitability for adaptation and also the ease with which it could be edited, e.g. to shorten its length. This is apparent from the comments by Negretti and Monicelli on some of the texts considered for publication. For instance, Negretti (1957, my translation) writes that in relation to Frank Herbert's *Twenty-first Century Sub* (*The Dragon in the Sea*), 'there is indeed some slowness, but there will be no difficulty making some cuts, which, if well-chosen, will succeed in streamlining the story and make it more flowing and therefore engaging'; while stating in regard to David Duncan, author of *Occam's Razor*, that he

is undoubtedly one of the best, it is clear that he knows his way in writing. But sometimes he gets carried away with scientific notions and this makes the narration too heavy. But since this *Occam's Razor* is quite long, it would be easy to lighten the more 'learned' pages. (Negretti, 1958, my translation)

Similarly, Monicelli (1960, my translation) commented that John Christopher's *The Year of the Comet* 'is an unusual novel, very well-written (Christopher is a British writer not new to literary experiences), a little bit "highbrow" [English in the original]: slightly trimmed of some dialogues and unnecessary slowness it could well be featured in *Urania*'. Sometimes the need to respect the series' standard length – around 120–150 pages per issue – was enough to call for cuts, or to suggest publication in a different and more prestigious series not restricted by the standard length of *Urania* (Iannuzzi, 2014a, pp. 35–37).

A complex series of motives was at work behind these various types of editorial and translational intervention. The texts had to be adapted to a readership very different from the original one: Italian publishers saw their target as consisting mostly of young people and/or people with a limited education, while in the English-speaking market of the 1950s the genre was already entering a mature phase, rich in socio-political reflections and critiques, and was well on its way to becoming the subject of new experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s. As a consequence, the Anglo-American production was subjected to quite blatant changes to turn it into something more akin to pure entertainment. A long-lasting issue regarding the hegemony of the humanities in the Italian education system and academic disciplines (Antonello, 2012) made the reception of publications related to technology and science even more arduous, and, as a result, the scientific and pseudo-scientific elements in the original versions were toned down in the target texts and often counter-balanced (in paratexts) by a different emphasis on other aspects considered more fantastic, adventurous and entertaining.

Moreover, the importance of economic factors cannot be underestimated (Milton, 2008): at a practical level, the decision to abridge a text might be made simply to comply with the expected number of pages of the series. In order to keep the price of an issue low (e.g. 150 lire<sup>9</sup>), Urania was forced to contain its production costs; the maximum number of pages was therefore fixed. Sometimes this meant that a novel had to be published elsewhere; more often it meant that the original version had to be shortened. In the Urania series, the Italian equivalent of the American pulp magazine, the physical characteristics of each book were strictly standardized, and issues of cost and seriality often took precedence over respect for artistic and authorial elements. Questions of standardization and commercial interests and strategies (Milton, 2000) placed limitations on the resources made available to editors for translations, revisions and proofreading.

## Final remarks

A recognition of the ample and wide-reaching wave of Anglo-American science fiction translations in Italy during the years of the economic boom (1950s–1960s) allows us to formulate some hypotheses on the significance of this cultural phenomenon, and on its connections with the broader cultural

context of post-World War II Italy, such as the formation of a transnational and transmedia genre's megatext, 'the large and mutable body of references that most [science fiction] artists and audiences consider to be the shared sub-cultural thesaurus of the genre' (Csicsery-Ronay, 2008, p. 275).<sup>10</sup>

Science fiction translations, with the adaptation of publishing formulas from pulp magazine models to the Italian market, epitomized a new phase in the industrialization of Italian culture, characterized by the emergence of new readerships. The fact that key figures in the history of science fiction publishing were both editors and translators, such as Giorgio Monicelli, points to the strong cultural agency necessary to operate within a genre that needed (and still needs) specific thematic and linguistic competences and skills, all the more so since there was no guidance from the traditional intellectual elites. At the same time, the translation of science fiction highlights the unique position of the genre across cultures, providing a fascinating vantage point from which to observe how literary systems operate.

Translations published in specialized series were characterized by a vast range of domestication and manipulation phenomena and omissions. A complex series of motives was at work behind these practices: not only a wish to adapt texts to a readership quite different from the original one (especially younger and/or less culturally prepared readers), but also economic factors. The 'popular' nature of the publishing formula meant that questions of cost and seriality could take precedence over artistic and linguistic ones: standardization and commercial interests and strategies imposed strong limitations on the publication process. It was not until the 1970s that genre publications whose reputation was based on 'good quality, unabridged translations' made their appearance, and – while remaining niche products – these are promoted in explicit opposition to the traditional and negligent practices of the earlier popular series.

The first translations of science fiction in Italy catered to a popular readership, their success being supported by the success of the genre on the big screen. This, together with its connection to the hard sciences, resulted in the exclusion of science fiction from the Italian 'Republic of Letters', hindering its cultural recognition.

## Notes

1. In his seminal 1979 work, Darko Suvin defined the science fictional novum or cognitive innovation as a ‘totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality’, where ‘its novelty is “totalizing” in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least crucial important aspects thereof’ estranging ‘the empirical norm of the implied reader’ (Suvin, 1979, p. 64; cf. Parrinder, 2001).
2. Including, for example, Diana Bianchi (Perugia), Eleonora Federici and Oriana Palusci (Naples), Carlo Pagetti (who taught in Naples, Turin, Milano) and Nicoletta Vallorani (Milan). On science fiction’s lack of critical recognition in Italy, see Iannuzzi (2015, pp. 94–98).
3. On the emblematic significance of translations of the phrase ‘science fiction’ in other languages, Gouanvic (1999, pp. 7–8).
4. On the cultural industrialization processes in post-World War II Italy, see Forgacs (1990) and Forgacs and Gundle (2007); on the publishing system, see Ferretti (2004, pp. 61–158); on the US influence in mass market publishing, see Gundle (2000, pp. 33–34); more generally, on the changes in cultural consumption in post-World War II Italy (and Europe) and the role of America, see Cavazza and Scarpellini (2010) and Scarpellini and Schnapp (2012).
5. In 1861, the year of the unification of Italy, 78% of citizens in the newly created nation were illiterate, compared to 21% in 1931, and 12.9% in 1951. Istituto nazionale di statistica ISTAT, Serie storiche.
6. On the disadvantaged position of scientific knowledge in Italian schools, academies and society at large see, for example, Bellone (2005) and De Mauro (2004). On critical prejudices towards science fiction in Italy, see Iannuzzi (2015, pp. 94–98) and Pagetti (1979).
7. These included Galassia [Galaxy] (5 issues, 1957), I narratori dell’Alfa Tau [Alfa Tau narrators] (9 issues, 1957), Cosmic (3 issues, 1957–58), Cronache del Futuro [Future Chronicles] (25 issues, 1957–58), Astroman (2 issues, 1957–58), Fantascienza [Science Fiction] (published by Turin-based S.A.I.E., 10 issues, 1957–59), I libri del Duemila [2000s Books] (10 issues, 1959), I romanzi del Futuro [Future Novels] (6 issues, 1961), Super Fantascienza illustrata [Super-Science Fiction Illustrated] (7 issues, 1961–62), Fantavventura [Fanta-Adventure] (2 issues, 1961), Superspazio [Super-Space] (10 issues, 1961–62), Corriere dello spazio [Space Newspaper] (51 issues, 1959–63) and Gli esploratori dello spazio [Space Explorers] (11 issues, 1961–63).

8. Hugo Gernsback (1884–1967), born in Luxembourg, was an American inventor, writer, editor and publisher, who through the editing of magazines such as *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories* had a founding role in the birth of science fiction as a genre (Westfahl, 1999).
9. Equivalent to a little less than 5 euros today (4.889 euros; 5.3 dollars ca.), according to ISTAT, Calcolo.
10. ‘As a critical concept, the megatext delineates the area where the fictive elements of science fiction overlap with their use in interpreting experiences in reality. That being said, it is important to note that the science fiction megatext is not the same for all competent audiences. Though it is not useless to speak of an ideal lexicon of science fiction elements, the competence of science fiction audiences is nonetheless profoundly influenced by social factors, especially class, nation, and gender’ (Csicsery-Ronay, 2008; p. 275). Cf. Broderick (2015): ‘The science fiction megatext comprises a virtual encyclopedia and specialized dictionary. For a story to be effective science fiction, it is insufficient that it invokes futuristic or extraterrestrial locales in ignorance of those narrative constraints or opportunities that already exist. These are embodied in science fiction’s century and more of imagined worlds and their inhabitants, created via specific rhetorical moves, tools and lexicons.’

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

Giulia Iannuzzi holds a BA and MA in Italian studies awarded cum laude at the Università Statale di Milano, and a PhD in humanities completed at the Università Statale di Trieste, Italy, in 2013. Her publications include *Distopie, viaggi spaziali, allucinazioni: Fantascienza italiana contemporanea* [Dystopias, space voyages, and hallucinations: Contemporary Italian science fiction] (Milan: Mimesis, 2015), *Fantascienza italiana: Riviste, autori, dibattiti, dagli anni Cinquanta agli anni Settanta* [Italian science fiction: Magazines, authors, debates, from the 1950s to the 1970s] (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), and, co-authored with Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Storie di uomini e libri. L’editoria letteraria italiana attraverso le sue collane* [Of Men and Books: An history of Italian publishing through collections] (Rome: minimum fax, 2014).

ORCID: Giulia Iannuzzi <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9656-8113>

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