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Flying Saucers Would Never Land in Lucca: The Fiction of Italian Science Fiction¹

Arielle Saiber

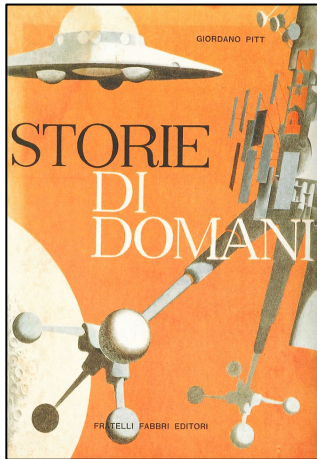


Fig. 1: Giordano Pitt, *Storie di domani* (Milan: Fratelli Fabbri, 1963). Reproduced with permission from Giuseppe Lippi, ed. *Dalla terra alle stelle. Tre secoli di Fantascienza e utopie italiane* (Milan: Biblioteca di via Senato, 2005).

Worse, perhaps, than calling Italian science fiction “derivative”—as has often been recited by science fiction readers and critics—is thinking it does not, or could not, exist. Consult a science fiction (hereafter, “SF”) anthology in English, the “it” language of SF, from any period and you will be hard-pressed to find a single author from Italy (see Appendix I). The same goes for encyclopedias of SF and companions of critical studies of SF written in English, where French, German, Russian, Polish, Japanese, Chinese, and Latin American authors are, on the other hand, discussed (see Appendix II). A large number of monographs in English on international SF has been published in the last few decades, including SF from Germany and Austria (*The Black Mirror* [Rottensteiner 2008]) and Latin America and Spain (*Cosmos Latinos* [Bell and Molina-Gavilán 2003]), as well as African American SF (*Dark Matter* [Thomas 2000]), feminist SF (*Women of Other Worlds* [Merrick and Williams 1999]), gay SF (*Kindred Spirits* [Elliot 1984]), Canadian SF (*Northern Stars* [Hartwell and Grant 1994]), Russian and Eastern European SF (*Beneath the Red Star* Zebrowski [1996]), and Jewish SF (*Wandering Stars* [Dann

¹ I would like to thank the following invaluable interlocutors for their time, thoughts, and exceedingly generous help in acquiring texts, images, and difficult to find information: Mauro Catoni, editor of *SF quadrant*; Giuseppe Lippi, author and editor of Mondadori’s *Urania* series; Carlo Bordoni, author and editor of the magazine *IF*; Silvio Sosio, author and editor of Delos Books and Fantascienza.com; Armando Corridore, author and editor of Elara Press; Ermes Bertoni editor of the *Catalogo SF, Fantasy e Horror*; author Giampietro Stocco; Luigi Petruzzelli, editor of Edizioni Della Vigna; and Luigi Lo Forti, Christian Antonini, and Vito Di Domenico, editors of *Altrisogni*. Thanks also to Marco Arnaudo, Pierpaolo Antonello, and Lisa Yaszek for their insights, reading, and commenting on early drafts of this study, and to Katharine Verville, fantascientific research assistant extraordinaire.

1998]). One can also find translations into English of SF novels and anthologies written in Romanian, Czech, Chinese, Hebrew, Croatian, Serbian, Finnish, Ukrainian, not to mention French, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese.² A study dedicated to Italian SF in English, or an anthology of Italian SF, however, has yet to see any light.³ Ask a non-Italian to name an Italian SF author, and you will likely get a blank stare. Ask a non-Italian SF fan to name an Italian SF author and they will laugh, pause, and realize sheepishly they do not know. Similarly, ask an Italian non-SF fan the same question and they may even be proud not to know (or maybe to know only one: Valerio Evangelisti). And if you dare ask an Italian SF fan, be ready for a long conversation. Some people (Italians and not) may propose the Futurists, or Italo Calvino as possible SF authors, and then retract that offer, realizing that these writers' future-related or science-related writings do not, for the most part, quite fit the genre, at least not the "generic," Anglo-Saxon one. Others might think of Tommaso Landolfi, Dino Buzzati, Primo Levi, or Italo Svevo—who did write what would be considered excellent SF—although not be able to name a SF novel or short story authored by them. A few people might have heard of, or even seen, Gabriele Salvatores's 1997 cyberpunk film *Nirvana*, or Mario Bava's classic *Terrore nello spazio* (1965; based on Renato Pestriniero's 1960 short story "Una notte di 21 ore," translated as *Planet of the Vampires* and inspirational to Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien*).⁴ Some may have caught an episode of the widely popular *A come Andromeda* (1972), an Italian T.V. adaptation by Inisero Cremaschi of Fred Hoyle and John Elliot's British show, *A for Andromeda* (1961). Some might think of the humorous writing of Stefano Benni in *Terra!* Others might cite adventure comic book series that included SF episodes, or focused on SF themes, such as *Nathan Never*. But even the few writers and scholars who have championed Italian SF have often done so with careful, almost apologetic terms. As SF author and critic Vittorio Catani has noted, "in principio fu il Verbo: USA" (2002).

"In fifty years of science fiction in Italy only one writer has appeared: Valerio Evangelisti" (Gallo 2003, 102).⁵ While Evangelisti is certainly a superb and prolific writer, this provocative sentence by SF critic and author Domenico Gallo is, of course, not true, although it is seemingly such, given how Italian SF is characterized at home and abroad. The editors of the 2007 *SFWA* (Science Fiction Writers of America) *European Hall of Fame* volume—who include a short story by Evangelisti—note how Italian SF has "rarely been garnered even the begrudging critical acceptance accorded the genre in

² There are collections in English of Romanian SF (Barbulescu and Anania 1994), Czech SF (Olsa 1994), Chinese SF (Wu and Murphy 1989), and novels and short stories from SF writers in Finnish (Sinisalo 2004), Serbian (Zickovic 2006), Ukrainian (Vynnychuk 2000), as well as many of French, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese SF. *The Apex Book of World SF* (2009) edited by the Israeli author Lavie Tidhar, includes short stories translated from Chinese, Croatian, Serbian, and Hebrew, as well as pieces written in English from Thailand, Australia/Fiji, the Philippines, Palestine, Malaysia, India, and France, but nothing from Italy.

³ There are very few publications in English on Italian SF. See Cremaschi (1982, 207-208); Crumphout (1989, 161-183); Frongia (1996, 158-169); Montanari (1981b, 504-517); Pagetti (1979, 320-326; 1987, 261-266; and 1993b, 630-632); Pizzo and Somigli (2007, 1717-1721); Proietti, Vaccaro, Baroncini (2009, 26-42); Ross (2007, 105-118); and Weiss (1988, 163-169).

⁴ Another film that may come to mind is Elio Petri's 1965 *La decima vittima*, with Marcello Mastroianni and Ursula Andress. The film, however, was based on a 1953 short story by Robert Sheckley called the "Seventh Victim."

⁵ All translations from the Italian, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

other European countries,” and has been allocated to the “ghetto of the ghetto” of genre SF (Morrow and Morrow 2007, 60).

All of this notwithstanding, the infamous pronouncement in the late 1960s or early 70s by the editor of the major Italian SF publication series *Urania*,⁶ Carlo Fruttero, when asked why *Urania* rarely if ever includes work by Italian authors—that it was “impossible to imagine a flying saucer landing in Lucca”—is being shown to have been quite off base.⁷ In this 1968 video clip from Rai News **[Figure 2]** filmed around the time of the comment about flying saucers in Lucca, Fruttero discusses why Italians do not, or rather, cannot, write good SF. Here he cites the Lombard town Boffalora (and not Lucca) as the kind of place a flying saucer would not land, as what would ensue would be a small, uninteresting chain of provincial and bureaucratic events that would not lead to a very good story:

A flying saucer lands, fishermen arrive. Who do they warn? The FBI? No, they go to the police chief. Then, from there, they call the mayor. The mayor gets in his Seicento and runs to the Prefect, and one sees right away that the dramatic situation falls; it becomes a sketch of local life that might have some ironic and amusing aspects to it, maybe some quaint, folkloristic elements, but no dramatic force.⁸

In a justifiably triumphant response to this glum prognosis, SF veteran writer, editor, and scholar Ugo Malaguti and writer, painter, and critic Mario Tucci produced an exceptional anthology of Italian SF from the last 40 years entitled, *A Lucca, mai!* (Malaguti and Tucci 1996) **[Figure 3]**.⁹ Flying saucers have, in fact, been landing in Lucca (although they seem to prefer to hover around Milan, Venice, Rome, Bologna, Turin, Florence, Piacenza, Chieti, and Siena) for quite some time, albeit not without a struggle, not without questionable crafts, and not without those who continue to insist they are not there.¹⁰

⁶ N.b., *Urania* is the long-running SF publication series housed in Mondadori, but was also the name of a short-lived journal (1952-53). References to *Urania*, unless otherwise noted, are to the book series rather than the journal. Under the *Urania* rubric there have been “sub-series,” such as *Urania classici* (1977-2002), *Urania Millemondi* (1971-), *Biblioteca di Urania* (1978-1983), *Urania blu* (1984-1985), *Urania argento* (1995-1996), *Urania collezione* (2003-), and a number of other smaller series. See <http://www.uraniamania.com/>.

⁷ This statement (“ma ve lo immaginate un disco volante che atterra a Lucca?”) has been repeatedly cited as something said by the editors of the *Urania* publication series, Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, at an interview during a conference on comics in Lucca (see, for example, Gaudenzi 2007, “Introduzione”), although other accounts say that it was said by Fruttero before Lucentini joined *Urania*.

⁸ <http://www.fantascienza.com/video/393/tempi-dispari-carlo-fruttero-e-gli-alieni-a-boff/>.

⁹ All the images associated with this article can be viewed at <https://skydrive.live.com/?cid=aeeb8025940c9278&sc=photos#cid=AEEB8025940C9278&id=AEEB8025940C9278!105&sc=photos>.

¹⁰ The visually compelling short film by Fabio Guaglione and Fabio Resinaro, *AfterVille* (2008), with American SF author Bruce Sterling in the role of the scientist Adam Vurius, has, in fact, quite a few spaceships landing in Turin.

Today's Italian SF magazines, book series, websites, fansites, and critical studies in Italian show that Italian SF narrative is, in fact, alive and, although often underground and veiled in the last century, has a remarkably rich and fascinating past. The present essay offers an overview of Italian SF narrative's history, its recurring thematics and styles, theories on what held it back, and hypotheses as to its future trajectories. My focus is SF narrative (not film or comic books), and I hope this study will help to open a conversation about Italian SF writing among Italianists in and outside of Italy, and among World SF scholars.

Genre SF

The term for the genre known as “science fiction,” while coined earlier in reference to scientific poetry,¹¹ was made famous in the US in 1932 by Hugo Gernsback, the publisher of the first, “official” SF magazine, *Amazing Stories*. He originally called the stories he published “scientifiction” when the magazine was born in 1926, but changed the term to “science fiction” when he left that magazine and created *Science Wonder Stories*.

It was not until two decades later that Italy started to actively translate and publish works in the SF genre. It was briefly called “scienza fantastica” in a magazine of the same name founded in 1952 by Vittorio Kramer and Lionello Torossi (the three first letters of each of their last names giving the publishing house its name: Krator), which lasted only seven issues; but it was Giorgio Monicelli—SF author and the first editor of the most popular and longest-living SF publication series, *Urania*, which also started in 1952 and has endured to this day—who dubbed it “fantascienza.” [Figs. 4-6] A short-lived magazine named *Fantascienza* edited by Garzanti also started in the 1950s. [Figure 7]

The Italian translation of SF as “fantascienza” merits a few words. In most languages the “science” part of the term is placed first, as in English.¹² Why Italy chose *fantascienza* instead of *scienza fantastica*, or *scienza finzione*, or *scienza fantasia*, or even *narrativa scientifica* as critic Gianfranco De Turreis (1997) points out, is not clear. Author, scholar, and current editor of *Urania* Giuseppe Lippi notes that it makes fantasy “a daring prefix,” putting it before science itself (2005, 15). Perhaps it has to do with the skepticism early twentieth-century Italy showed toward the sciences, although if that were the issue,

¹¹ The first use of the “science fiction” is attributed to William Wilson in 1851 in a treatise on scientific poetry. See James (1994, 7-8).

¹² Of all the major European languages only Italian, Polish, and Portuguese place the “fiction” first: in Polish it is *fantastyka naukowa* and in Portuguese *ficção científica*. Spanish-speakers in many countries call it *ciencia ficción*; in French it is *science-fiction*; in German *Sciencefiction*; in Swedish and Norwegian, they use the English, “science fiction”; in Czech it is *vědecká fantastika*; in Greek *επιστημονική φαντασία*; in Croatian *znanstvenoj fantastici*; in Romanian *științifico-fantastice*; in Hungarian *tudományos fantasztikus*; in Finnish *tieteiskirjallisuus* (*tietei* = science; *skirjallisuus* = fiction); and in Icelandic it is *vísindaskáldskapur* (*vísinda* = science; *skáld* = poet; *skapur* = creation). Three non-European, large producers of SF Russia, Japan, and China also put the science first. In Russian it is *научная фантастика* (*nauchanaya* = science; *fantastika* = fantastic); in Japanese it is *kagaku shōsetsu* (*kagaku* = science; *shōsetsu* = fiction); and in Chinese it is *ke huan xiao shuo* (*ke huan* = science, *xiao shuo* = fiction).

why not take the “science” out all together, as the Danish and Dutch did, and substitute it with “future”?¹³ While literature that could be considered “proto-SF”—with its utopias, fantastic journeys in space and under the sea, alternate histories, and even depictions of alien life—has been around since antiquity, and certainly present in the Italian canon,¹⁴ “genre SF” developed in the US, and subsequently around the world, in the early twentieth century (James 1994; Yaszek 2011). Once it took off, the main currents in the genre looked like this: in the 1940s and 50s in the US classic, “hard SF” had what is known as its Golden Age (think Isaac Asimov); by the 60s and 70s the “British New Wave SF” writers (think J. G. Ballard) were contributing an alternative, “softer” version of SF, with less emphasis on technology and the laws of science and more focus on psychological and socio-economic issues; a special-effect heavy form of the epic “space-opera” subgenre (*Star Wars* is a good example) arrived in the 70s, along with feminist SF (such as writings by Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ), ecological and race-relations SF (Octavia Butler’s work, for example), and archeological SF (the innovators being Erich von Däniken, as well as two Italians: Pier Domenico Colosimo [aka, Peter Kolosimo] and Luigi Rapuzzi [aka, L. R. Johannis]). In the 80s and 90s, with the explosion of information technology, near-future subgenres like “cyberpunk” (William Gibson being its most well-known author, although the term was coined by Bruce Bethke in his 1983 short story “Cyberpunk”), and near-past subgenres like “steampunk” (with authors such as K. W. Jeter, Tim Powers, Paul Di Filippo) had their heyday. Late twentieth and early twenty-first century SF has seen an explosion in uchronias (alternate histories), with European authors producing some of the best (Evangelisti’s *Eymerich* novels are a good example, although the books have still not been translated into English).

While genre SF has often imagined the dark sides of the future (or alternate presents and pasts), the optimism of its earliest years (the 1920s-40s)—the excitement at the thought of discovering new worlds and new, galactic and extragalactic life, and science and technology’s promise for a better life—are less common (although certainly not absent) in current SF. Dissolution, chaos, dystopic and post-apocalyptic visions of the environment, economies, governments, societies and humanity are SF’s current subjects of choice. What is more, the genre of SF itself is in the process of transforming in radical ways, with modes/subgenres such as “slipstream,” “interstitial fiction,” and “nextilism,” which are all exploring new intersections with other genres, and even media, such as

¹³ The Danish and Dutch take the word “science” out entirely— for the Danish it is “future fiction” (*fremtidsromaner*), and for the Dutch, “future fantasy” (*toekomstfantasie*)—but the “fiction” still comes second.

¹⁴ A discussion of proto-SF would require another essay altogether. There are numerous works in the Italian canon, as well as in popular writing of from the nineteenth century through the 1950s (the latter date being when genre SF came to Italy) that could be considered precursors to Italian SF. Most cited among these narratives of adventurous travel, fantastic travel, and utopia are the following: Dante’s *Commedia*, Marco Polo’s *Milione*, Folengo’s *Baldus*, Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, Doni’s *Mondi*, Agostini’s *I dialoghi dell’infinito*, Campanella’s *Città del sole*, Zaccaria Seriman’s *Viaggi di Enrico Wanton alle terre incognite austali ed ai regni delle scimmie e dei cinocefali*, Chiari’s *L’uomo di un altro mondo*, Casanova’s *Icosameron*, Ippolito Nievo’s *Storia filosofica dei secoli futuri*, Dossi’s *La colonia felice*, Grifoni’s *Dalla Terra alle stelle*, works of the Scapigliati, the nineteenth-century Neapolitan stories and illustrations of Pulcinella’s voyage to moon, as well as the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century adventure tales of Antonio Ghislanzoni, Paolo Mantegazza, Emilio Salgari, Yambo, and Luigi Motta. For an excellent anthology of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italian proto-SF, see De Turrís and Gallo (2001). See also Valla (2000a; 2000b; 2000c).

video gaming and the digital arts. As SF's boundaries are redrawn, so are questions as to the nature of "fiction" in science, and in our multiple realities.

Since its "generic" beginnings—the late 1920s in the US, and the 50s in Italy—SF has primarily been considered a "pop" genre, like detective or romance pulp novels, although often more brainy, technical, and male-oriented. Like any genre, it is difficult to define. Most people would agree that it should have something to do with science, and yet how much and in what ways continue to be debated. John Clute and Peter Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* lists more than thirty definitions of SF, many of which include terms such as "cognitive," "speculation," "alternate," "future," "possibility," "change," "invention," "the new" (Clute and Stableford, 1993 311-314). Some of the definitions emphasize SF's function as social critique, some require that it use scientific method and principles in explaining events, but most point to it as the narrative thought experiment par excellence. Most readers would agree that a SF narrative contains some combination of amazing and/or ominous technologies (hardware, software, biological, etc.), aliens, robots, cyborgs, outerspace, time travel, or alternate realities, but fixes its "ground rules" in our world. The *nova* we encounter in SF—as Darko Suvin has named them—are often logically extrapolated, courtesy of our science, or alien science, or a bit of both.

Many scholars and writers believe SF should be about imagining the future, but equally many note that it also may engage alternate realities set in the present or past. SF is often set in contrast to the fantasy genre ("sword and sorcery" texts, like *Lord of the Rings*) and even superhero genres, as SF speaks of possibilities within the real world, while fantasy/superhero fiction of the supernatural and impossible. In other words, SF consists of ordinary people encountering extraordinary—but possible, even if remotely so—inventions or circumstances, as opposed to fantasy and superhero fiction, where extraordinary beings routinely do extraordinary things, and neither the non-superhero characters nor the readers are surprised that they can. Some would argue that SF attempts to make the unfamiliar seem natural and familiar, while Suvin calls SF a literature of "estrangement" that moves us away from our empirical environment (quoted in Clute and Stableford, 311). SF author and scholar Samuel Delany calls SF a "subjunctive reality" (1969, 61), and many would agree that it is a literature of "if." Some prefer to call this kind of literature "speculative fiction," or "alternate fiction," rather than SF; others go as far as to say it should not be considered a genre at all. And then there are the astute but frustrating definitions, like that by Norman Spinrad, who says "science fiction is anything published as science fiction" (Clute and Stableford, 1993, 314), or Tom Shippey's view that "science fiction is hard to define because it is the literature of change and it changes while you are trying to define it" (quoted in Maxim and Edwards 1983, 258).

Fixing a single definition for SF is, of course, a futile task. But contemplating what a given national SF is about engenders a panoply of fascinating issues that can illuminate the genre—or mode, if you prefer—as a whole.

Parsing Italian SF, Part I

Given SF's often global, galactic, and transgalactic considerations and implications, one would think it would be the most universal of genres. Yet the US has been the *Ur*-nation that SF writers in other parts of the world have looked to as their model. Franz Rottensteiner, who edited one of the few English-language anthologies of European SF, said in 1973 that European SF writers are "freer" than Americans, as they are not constrained by the "fossilized patterns of the genre" (xiv). This may be to some degree, but many European SF writers have done everything they could to imitate the American Golden Age style, and certainly there were American writers of SF who pushed the boundaries and danced on the edges of the genre. Like Rottensteiner, the Morrrows believe that there has been and still is quiet a bit of difference between US and European SF. They offer a reductive (they admit it to be such), yet intriguing saying to illustrate their position: "What is the difference between Europeans and Americans? Europeans think 100 miles is a long distance, and Americans think 100 years is a long time" (Morrow and Morrow, 17).

Donald Wollheim in his anthology of European SF also notes variance between European and American SF, although he does so with an even larger dose of stereotyping, some of which he acknowledges as problematic, some not. Even if he confesses that he may be subject to preconceptions about these countries, he does not hesitate to speak sweepingly of the problem of time as a "veritable obsession with the French," and of our view of Spain as a "languid country, somewhat backward, and rather colorfully quaint" (Wollheim 1976, 1 and 215). With regard to the two excellent stories he includes from Italy—Sandro Sandrelli's "The Scythe" and Luigi Cozzi's "Rainy Day Revolution No. 39"—he writes:

Italy—religious Italy, stronghold of the church eternal. Italy—modern Italy, pioneer of engineering design, land of artistic ingenuity. Somehow this story [Sandrelli's] captures the contradictions that one associates with the many facets of that country, which exasperates even while it enchants.... If there is one thing about Modern Italy, it is the impression that every visitor gets that the nation is about to explode into violent revolution.... [The Italians, though] go about their daily business with an indifference to all this hysteria. (Ibid. 41 and 95)

It would take a long time to deconstruct the various issues Wollheim's views raise. What I wish to point out by citing his comments and those of other Anglo-Saxon anthologists of World SF, however, is how even well-intentioned scholars who are doing a great service by publishing World SF in English, may end up characterizing non-US SF through quick generalizations and in terms of its "unlike-ness" to that of the US. Essentially they are looking for ways to do two things: first, explain why these countries were not the genre's initiators, nor its luminaries, even if they can be shown to have

harbored pre-twentieth century proto-SF authors; and, secondly, isolate what about the given national SF *is* noteworthy.

At the turn of the century the US was becoming highly industrialized and a world power—a card carrying member of a technoscientific elite; it was a comparatively young country, filled with optimism for the future; there was a strong emphasis on and financial support for scientific study and technological advances; there were visionary publishers early on, like Hugo Gernsback and John Campbell; the US was centrally involved in the space race and in the Cold War. This cocktail of optimism, power, money, industrialization, and a pro-science stance set the stage for the development of a technoscience-oriented vision of the future and present, complete with the dreams (and nightmares) not only of reaching the stars, but of conquering and colonizing them; dreams (and nightmares) of what the rapidly emerging technologies would bring.

Italy, by contrast, had taken a very different path at the turn of the century and up through WWII. While the experience of the *vittoria mutilata* after WWI—with the poverty and sense of injustice that ensued—may well have contributed to the rise of Fascism with its accompanying optimism for future grandeur, as well as to the pro-technology enthusiasm of the Futurist art movement, early twentieth-century Italy as a whole did not have waiting in the wings, nor did it seek out, a technoscientific future. Yes, there were Marconi's Nobel Prize in 1909 for wireless telegraphy and Fermi's Nobel in 1938 for work on induced radioactivity. Yes, a number of literary writers in pre-WWII Italy were in dialogue with science in their writing (albeit not as genre SF), and many writers and scholars recognized Italy's great scientific heritage as part of the humanities, not separate from it. But the sciences were not, overall, prized and richly funded in these decades, due both to intellectual predilections towards the humanities over the sciences, and to financial realities. In a country that was not able to afford (and, in some cases, not willing to afford even if it could), what new technologies could offer it, industrialization moved slowly and writers had fewer stimuli for envisioning a technofuture. What is more, literacy rates were low in pre-WWII Italy, and there was not a large middle class readership that would support any popular narrative genre,¹⁵ although comic books and *fotoromanzi* of a variety of genres, SF included, were produced (when not banned by the Fascist regime) and became quite popular between the wars.

Given such circumstances, US and World SF narrative came slowly to Italy, and SF written and published by Italians even more slowly. These obstacles, together with the general lack of interest that literary publishers showed for producing any kind of SF—and particularly that of its own citizens—had the effect of discouraging many writers from even trying. Add the fact that Italian was not a language with a large global readership, and that the costs of translating and distribution were prohibitive for many writers and publishers, Italian SF seemed destined to remain in small, dark corners.

Yet even when Italy began to industrialize and gain a presence as an economic world power after WWII, even when literacy rates increased and Italian publishers were putting translations of US, UK, and World SF on their shelves, editorial disdain for SF written by Italians continued. This resistance cannot merely be attributed to the publishing and academic worlds' condescension toward "pulp" literature and film: by the 1960s there

¹⁵ [Editors' note: On one such popular genre, see Billiani's essay, "Il testo fantasticizzato e goticizzato come metafora della destrutturazione del discorso 'nazione': attorno agli scrittori scapigliati" in this volume.]

were successful Italian pulp genres, such as the *giallo*, the *rosa*, the *romanzo d'appendice*, and horror, even if still dwarfed by the consumption of those genres in *fumetti* and films. Italian literary publishers continued to hold, it seems, an image of themselves and their compatriots as unable to write SF. The 1958 satiric film *Totò nella Luna*, directed by Steno and Lucio Fulci, seems to point to precisely this: in an argument with an aspiring SF writer Totò says “why do we need to conquer space? What does one do with space? What is space? It’s nothing! It’s air! You want to conquer air? Open a window and you conquer air!” Most Italian readers of SF, in fact, did not contest that Italians could not write good SF, and were ardent in their demand for translations of foreign SF, not for that penned by their fellow citizens.

Numerous scholars in Italy have written extensively about the whos, whats, wheres, whens, whys and hows of Italian SF literary publication from the 1950s-today. I will offer only the briefest of overviews here, and refer readers to the appendices and to section 5 of the bibliography, which lists secondary sources. The earliest SF magazines and series were *Scienza fantastica* (1952-1953), *Mondi nuovi* (1952), *Urania* the magazine (1952-1953) and *Urania* the book series (1952-), *Galassia* (1953; 1957; 1961-1979), and *Fantascienza* (1954-1955, 1957-1961). Some of the well-loved publications that started later were *Interplanet* (1962-1965), *Futuro* (1963-1964), *Gamma* (1965-1968), *Science fiction book club* (1963-1979), *Nova SF** (1967-1980; 1985-), *Millemondi* (1971-), *Andromeda* (1972-1975), *Fantacollana* (1973-), *Robot* (1976-1979; 2003-), *Il libro d'oro della fantascienza* (1978-), and *Altri mondi* (1986-1993). **[Figs. 8-26]** Many of these publications, however, focused on American and British SF, and few Italian authors were included. Among the ones that published Italian SF more than occasionally were/are *Scienza fantastica*, *Interplanet*, *Galassia*, *I romanzi del cosmo*, *Cronache del futuro*, *Oltre il cielo*, *Gamma*, *Nova SF**, *Millemondi*, *Andromeda*, and *Robot*. Magazines that published primarily Italian SF were very few: *I narratori dell'Alpha Tau*, *Giro planetario* (1961), *Futuro*, and *Constellation* (1971-1972). The first published SF novel by an Italian author in the *Urania* series was *L'Atlantide svelata* by Emilio Walesko (1954, no. 31) **[Figure 27]**, and the second was by Franco Enna, *L'astro lebbroso* (1955, no. 73) **[Figure 28]**.

The visually stunning covers of many of these journals (many of which are included in the illustrations that accompany this essay) have received some critical study and deserve more, especially considering how visual a genre SF is, and how easily it lends itself to art, film, television, comic books, and gaming. And perhaps it does so too easily, seducing potential, contemporary readers (and writers) away from the joys of imagining these strange other worlds themselves. Critic and author Gianni Montanari has calculated that between 1952-1979 there were seventy-one SF series, twenty SF magazines, and 2256 books published in Italy (1981b, 456)—mostly of Anglophone SF, though. Between 1954-1967 Gian Filippo Pizzo and Luca Somigli say that there were 114 Italian SF novels published, only eleven with the authors’ real names (2007, 1720). By the mid-1970s and early 80s a substantial number of SF publishers opened their doors: Nord, Libra, Fanucci, Dall'Oglio, Sugar, and Armenia, and SF (again, primarily Anglophone) was beginning to be sold more in bookstores than at newsstands (De Turrís 1995, 225). Only a few anthologies of Italian SF, however, had been published in Italy by this time (interestingly, around a dozen anthologies of Italian SF had been published elsewhere in

Europe, such as in France, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary), and very few novels (Aldani 1989, 13).

In 1978, Italy (Palermo) hosted the first major academic conference on SF in Europe, with an international panel of stars, including Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Brian Aldiss, Franz Rottensteiner, and Darko Suvin, as well as Italian authors and critics Luigi Russo, Roberto Vacca, Franco Ferrini, Carlo Pagetti, Inisero Cremaschi, Vittorio Curtoni, Gianni Montanari, and many more (1980). Not in attendance, but among the few academic supporters of SF in Italy were Sergio Solmi and Umberto Eco. SF reading, writing, and study seemed to be on its way up.¹⁶

In the late 1970s and 80s, blockbuster films from the US brought the genre to more people, although there is no evidence that it inspired more readers of SF in Italy. In the 1990s, cyberpunk exploded, with its violent, graphic visions of a near future ruled by information technologies, genetic engineering, and the like. By the 2000s, as in the US and elsewhere, Italian SF writers begin to cross more into other genres, like horror, noir, and detective fiction. As critic and author Carlo Bordonni notes, topics that are closer to real life *cronaca*, such as terrorism, mafias, eco-disasters, genetic engineering comprise much of today's SF (2009, 180).

But returning to the early years: the 1950s-1960s, the “age of the alias” (Montanari 1981b, 457) in which to be published in Italy, you had infinitely more luck if you were Anglo-Saxon (better yet, American). While pseudonyms are often used by authors writing any sort of pulp fiction for myriad reasons, this particular wave of pseudonyming is remarkable both for the quantity and the qualities of names chosen.¹⁷ One wonders if the authors were actually imagining themselves *as* American writers, writing for an American audience, reveling in the art of *mimesis*, or if the American-sounding name was as far as the dissimulation went. In some cases, direct imitation of US SF seems to have been the goal. In others, however, one would be hard pressed to imagine an American behind those narratives, rich as they were with European history, culture, and humanistic learning.

Early (and not so early) Italian SF writers used an impressive array of Anglophone pseudonym strategies. A common one was creating Americanized anagrams of one's name, such as Lionel Cayle (Leonida Celli), Daniel Griosa (Sergio Aldani), and N. L. Janda (Lino Aldani). Another popular approach was to Americanize the sounds of one's name and/or translate the name into English.¹⁸ There are many that strike the Anglophone

¹⁶ For more on the history of SF scholarship in Italy, see Russo (1978) and Pagetti (1979).

¹⁷ Among the most Anglo-American-sounding *noms de plume* were Samuel Barber/Balmer (Sandro Sandrelli), Julian Berry (Ernesto Gastaldi) [Figure 29], Max Bohl, Jr. (Ivo Prandin), Norah Bolton (Bianca Nulli), Clift Brady (Cesare Falessi), Max Dave (Pino Belli), Ricky Gecky (Ugo Malaguti), L. R. Johannis (Luigi Rapuzzi) [Figure 30], Woody Gray (Luigi Rapuzzi), Charles F. Obstbaum (Carlo Fruttero—even the editor of the *Urania* series who did not want to publish Italian SF wrote pseudonymous SF!), Elizabeth Stern (Maria Teresa Maglione) [Figure 31], Sidney Ward (Franco Lucentini—another *Urania* editor!), and the unabashed specimens of Edgar P. Allan (Egardo Beltrametti) and Jack Azimov (used by Antonio Bellomi, Luigi Naviglio, and Pierfrancesco Prosperi, alternately and collectively). Lists of Italian SF writers and their pseudonyms can be found in the *Catalogo SF, Fantasy e Horror*, ed. Vegetti et al., <http://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/IndiceA.htm>; in Pilo, *Catalogo generale della fantascienza in Italia, 1930-1979* (1980); and at Fantabancarella: <http://www.fantabancarella.com/pseudo.html>.

¹⁸ Examples include Audie Barr (Adriano Baracco) [Figure 32], Richard A. Cheking (Riccardo Cecchini), Lewis Coates (Luigi Cozzi), P. D. Four (Pasquale De Quattro), Peter Kolosimo (Pier Domenico Colosimo), Hugh Maylon (Ugo Malaguti) [Figure 33], Robert Rainbell (Roberta Rambelli) [Figure 34], Brian River

ear as humorous, whether intentionally or not, such as Welcome Braun (Luciano Ghilardi), Rocky Docson (Roberta Rambelli) [Figure 35], Lewis Flash (Luigi Naviglio), James Gut (Antonio Bellomi), Hunk Hanover (Roberta Rambelli), and my personal favorite, complete with Eastern European flair, Marren Baĝels (Maria e Ornella De Barba) [Figure 36].

Greek letters (which certainly would have appealed to mathematicians, engineers, and emerging computer scientists everywhere), for example, often found their way into these aliases: Charles Beta (Dino De Rugeriis), Billy Delta (Santi Palladino), Howard Gamma (Dino de Rugeriis, again), Peter Jota (Dino De Rugeriis, again!), Jim Omega/Omega Jim (Pier Domenico Colosimo), and John Sigma (used by Ubaldo Tambini, Vera Cagnoli, and, of course, Dino De Rugeriis).

Although not in line with trying to hide an Italian identity, some early SF writers chose spirited oddities, conveying a playfulness to their SF, or at least their relationship to SF: Anonimo Cosmico (Sergio Turone), Papa Benedetto XIV (Prospero Lambertini), Cozzilla (Luigi Cozzi), Effepici (F. P. Conte), Pi Erre (Renato Pestriniero), and Damiano Malabaila (Primo Levi) [Figure 37]. Some writers, expanding beyond Anglo-Saxony, choose to replace their Italian names with other foreign sounding names.¹⁹ Many authors used multiple pseudonyms, and some even chose to be a “jr.” of a previous author’s pseudonym, such as Giuseppe Lippi’s alias “P. Kettridge, Jr.” in honor of Franco Lucentini’s “P. Kettridge.”

With this alias mania, Italian writers participated—albeit not always willingly—in the vicious cycle of anti-Italianness, conforming to the perception that Italians could not, should not, and did not write SF. It is odd to think that a country that had produced such remarkable visions of other worlds and forms of life, that had offered the world so many major scientific and technological advancements, and that has been renowned for its innovative design, believed its citizens unable to write SF, whether hard SF, soft SF, or the many subgenres thereof. How could a culture not admit the seeds of SF in the other-worldly pilgrimage of Dante; the space travel of Ariosto; Leonardo’s visionary flying machines; the infinite space and worlds of Bruno; the utopias of Doni and Campanella; the galaxy-shifting paradigm of Galileo; the communication technology of Marconi; and the technophilia of the Futurists, to name but a few? Isaac Asimov saw it; why didn’t they? Pierpaolo Antonello notes a letter that Asimov wrote to Arnaldo Mondadori in the early 1950s with regard to the new *Urania* magazine (1952-1953): “I hope they [the magazines] are doing well and that Italy, which gave Galileo, da Vinci and all the great scientists of the Renaissance to the world, will continue always to be interested in the imaginative world of the future” (2004, 115).

Clearly, the notion that Italians cannot write SF (or good SF) has its home in a knotty web of issues comprised both of external forces and self-imposed ones. Among the external forces, we can affirm that there was a tenacious emphasis throughout the first half of the century on humanistic study over science; a slowness to industrialize; minimal

(Brenno Fiumali), Mary Sweater (Maria Teresa Maglione), Herald To Life (Eraldo De Vita), Robert Weather (Roberto Temporini).

¹⁹ For instance, Omat Eagidim Arbilà (Gaetano Alibrandi), Leo Bataille (Cesare Falessi), Megalos Diekonos (Massimo Lo Jacono), Lao-Ye (Maria Teresa Maglione), Igor Latychev (Roberta Rambelli), Jean Le Russe (Laura Toscano), Adàn Zzywwurrath (Franco Porcarello), and the more recent Akira Mishima (Lorenzo Bartoli) [Figure 38].

access to American SF narrative before the 1950s; exhaustion, poverty, and disarray after a World War; low literacy rates and an inclination toward the visual (comic books, *fotoromanzi*, and film); substantial condescension toward consumer; and most certainly, the publishing world's resistance to publishing its own authors (a consequence, perhaps, of the earlier obstacles, but certainly a negative external force on the writers). As to other factors that may have contributed to the hamstringing of genre Italian SF, I will discuss below the theories most frequently cited by Italian literary critics and social historians. No single factor alone is to blame for sabotaging Italian SF narrative. And the degree to which each of these factors—and likely others that future scholars will identify—contributed to holding back SF narrative is up for debate.

The most commonly mentioned obstacle to Italian SF's growth is Italy's love affair with its past (that ball-and-chain from which the Futurists tried to liberate Italians). With a past so rich and so omnipresent in Italy's daily life, turning one's gaze up toward a future potentially not as bright as its past might be difficult. Yet Italian culture has also been lauded (and criticized) for its tendency to live in an improvised "now," and twentieth (and twenty-first) century Italy has been artistically innovative: on the cutting edge of film, architecture, and design. And perhaps it is precisely this siren-song of the past that has made Italian SF authors particularly interested in and adept at writing the popular SF subgenre of *uchronia*. While focusing on the glory of one's history may distract from thinking about the now and after, it might also offer a Vichian long view of the cycles of time and what may be coming for all nations. It certainly offers rich data for re-thinking historic events and "what ifs."

Another impediment to SF's acceptance and growth in Italy that scholars have mentioned is the figure of the early and mid- twentieth century leftist intellectual publisher/professor/critic, suspicious of capitalism and all things American. But if leftist politics had a role in suppressing Italian SF, how do we explain the large quantity of successful SF produced in communist countries, and the fact that many Italian SF writers were, and are, leftist intellectuals? There is no doubt that there was some prejudice expressed by certain leftist groups—and those of the right, too—against "things American," escapist pulp literature being precisely one of those things. But big publishing houses such as Mondadori *did* publish American SF as early as the 1950s, and American SF has been widely translated and read throughout the country for a long time. How much of a role the antipathy, from both the left and the right, toward American consumer culture played in SF's marginalization is unclear. What *is* clear, though, is that SF writers have often seen themselves as politically *impegnati*, wanting their work to open eyes and induce change. With terrorism exploding from the left and right in the '70s and '80s, it is not surprising Italian SF would get involved. From 1977-1982, for example, the radical left collective "Un'Ambigua Utopia" (which derived its name from Ursula Le Guin's 1974 novel *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* and published a magazine of the same name) strived to do just that. They believed that the technocratic optimism found in SF written by authors like Asimov was not the only, or even the best, form of the genre. Instead, they saw—as some Golden Age, but more British New Wave SF had—the most important elements of SF rooted in psychological, socio-politically engaged issues. In the late '70's Feltrinelli published *Nei labirinti della fantascienza: Guida critica a cura del Collettivo "Un'Ambigua Utopia"* (Un'Ambigua Utopia, 1978) which proposed and discussed 140 World SF works that exemplified what they saw as

best about the genre. Interest in Un'Ambigua Utopia has returned, and quite recently two founding members of the group published a volume containing all the material from the magazine's nine issues: *Un'ambigua utopia. Fantascienza, ribellione e radicalità negli anni '70* (Caronia e Spagnul 2009). Equally clear in its leftist *impegno* is the print-based magazine *Carmilla* and the webzine of the same name, founded and edited by none other than Valerio Evangelisti.²⁰ In 2003 SF veteran author, editor and scholar Vittorio Catani guest edited a special issue entitled "Futuro nel sangue: 19 fantapologhi italiana sul potere" (Catani 2003).

A less commonly cited obstacle to the production and publication of Italian SF narrative is the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century preference for *verismo* and *neorealismo* in the arts. While SF might seem directly at odds with these realist movements, a few layers below the surface it becomes clear that was not the case. What is more, literature of the fantastic, surrealism, and horror not only existed in Italian literature throughout the twentieth century, but prospered. If anything, SF is often very much concerned with "the real" (as well as "the possible"), depicting and dissecting "reality" as if under a microscope, or imagining what it might become in the future. A great deal of SF also offers political, economic, and social critiques, both directly and allegorically. What then kept the *veristi* and *neorealisti*—the taste-makers, or taste-police of much of the twentieth century—away from SF? Was it the possible "realities" that SF depicts: universal domination, alien life forms, robots, time travel, and the like? Perhaps Italy could no longer imagine itself as a dominator of peoples and worlds; perhaps the idea of invaders was too familiar and something they wanted to forget; and maybe robots and time travel were too alien in a primarily agrarian nation to seem possible. Yet Italian realism is also known for its inclination toward pessimism, and when paired with a religious bent, its fatalism. SF is excellent at imagining the worst possible scenarios for just about every action and reaction. Its frequent pre- and post-apocalyptic, dystopic visions of despair parallel much of what a newly-formed nation that went through two wars, a dictatorship, and extensive poverty experienced. Perhaps SF was seen as too frightening in its predictions, and *too real*. Italy had a great deal on its hands in terms of its identity-building and survival to be imagining more wars, intruders, and technologies they had not even begun to cultivate. The (alternative and/or displaced) "realities" that SF offered were not ones early and mid-twentieth-century Italy was ready to face.

And finally, the elephant in Italy's room: the Church. I do not think it is a coincidence that the majority of early SF writers came from predominantly Protestant, Anglican, and communist countries (France is an anomaly here), and not just because they had a more developed middle class readership in the early and mid twentieth century. Roman Catholicism may have had a role in holding back the development of the genre, although not in the way that might immediately come to mind: as looming large with punishments for the sin of false prophecy (as well as all the other sins writers of pulp fiction could be condemned for) and for visionary religious reformers, such as Giordano Bruno. No Italian SF texts (nor comic books or films, as far as I know) have been banned by the Church, even those most fiercely critiquing Christian thought, dogma, or individuals. Catholicism, I would argue, actually *offers* elements that other Christian denominations or atheist belief systems do not. The Catholic faith—its doctrine, liturgy, rites, and

²⁰ *Carmilla* the magazine can be purchased at various bookstores. *Carmilla* the webzine can be found at <http://www.carmillaonline.com/>.

hagiography—lends a great deal to the imagination: miracles, saints with special powers, the realms of the afterlife, an apocalypse, a world order, a particular relationship to human time/space and God time/space. Maybe these mysteries, portrayed in art and architecture, altars and symbols on nearly every Italian city corner, satisfy some psychological or emotional need for envisioning one's control, destiny, and the beyond. But even if that is the case, there is a great deal of positively-valenced spirituality and religious symbolism in Italian SF narrative. As with Italy's great past both holding back and inspiring its present and future, Catholic doctrine may have contributed as much to filling a "need" to write SF, as to inspiring it.

These roadblocks are not, it seems, as ominous and large as some would have them be. In certain cases, they turn out not to be obstacles at all, but rather catalysts. While Italian SF, as Catani (2002) notes, never really constructed a specific identity or base of production and its authors did not start "schools" or groups (except for Un'Ambigua Utopia and a few small, recent movements I will mention later), a cabal of authors and publishers beginning with Monicelli, Sandrelli, Aldani, Musa and Cremaschi nurtured an array of remarkable writers who continue their legacy to this day. The next section of this essay attempts the precarious endeavor of providing a snapshot of what Italian SF narrative was and is. As we will see, history, religion, totalitarian regimes, realistic portrayals of the human, celebration of the humanities and arts, pessimism about science and about the future are the very elements that have engendered Italian SF narrative's most extraordinary works.

Parsing Italian SF, Part II

As Vonnegut put it, "and so it goes...." By talking about what Italian SF is, I, like those before me, risk trafficking in generalizations and stereotypes. What is more, the enterprise may be doomed from the start. What to do when one encounters a book like Massimo Mongai's *Memorie di un cuoco d'astronave* (1997) [Figure 39], which focuses on the gastronomic philosophy and adventures of an intergalactic chef named Rudy "Basilico" Turturro on a mission to bring Italian food to all species the galaxy over? *Memorie*, winner of the Premio Urania, is greatly appreciated by the Italian SF community. A wild and funny read, akin to that of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhikers Guide* books and Stefano Benni's *Terra!*, it satirizes Italy's culinary obsessions and the world's obsession with Italian cuisine, using the SF genre as a medium in which to laugh at, but also to celebrate, one of the aces Italy knows it has in its pocket.

As many Italian scholars and SF authors who have discussed Italian SF have pointed out, the genres of fantasy, horror, and the fantastic all seem to appeal more to the modern Italian reader than SF. Pagetti believes it has something to do with "the cognitive rhetoric" of hard, genre SF (1993, 631). This observation challenges us to understand what "cognitive rhetoric" is and why a nation renowned for its facility with rhetoric and rich with "thought-variant" rather than "gadget-variant" stories (see Yaszek, 2008, 388) would be adverse to such literature. Appealing to Italy's propensity toward the "wonderful and whimsical," as Pagetti does, sheds light on the shape that Italian SF seems to have taken. Italian SF has been characterized by Italian authors themselves as

“neo-fantastico” (Pagetti 1993, 631); “softer” (Montanari 1981b, 456); more introspective and psychological, with more humor and satire, use of history, and the manipulation of time (Gaudenzi 2007) than SF produced elsewhere. Catani has noted that much Italian SF fuses genre themes with “narrativa italiana colta” (high literary narrative) and unique linguistic forms (2002). And many have noted the “humanness” of Italian SF. Author and editor, Inisero Cremaschi, in his introduction to the 1964 *I labirinti del terzo pianeta*—the second anthology of Italian SF published in Italy—says that Italian science fiction “distinguishes itself from foreign science fiction because it leads us to other galaxies...in order to bring us back to the place of departure: Earth” (1964, 10). Similarly, Italian SF grandfather and one of its most prolific and famed authors Lino Aldani noted that “Italian authors tried, right from the beginning, to offer a highly concrete, real, convincing representation of the human condition” (quoted in Della Corte and Pestriniero 1996, 53). The concrete reality of the human condition does permeate much (though not all) Italian SF and echoes the *verista* and *neorealista* modes thought by some to have been in opposition to Italian SF’s.

The most interesting and, I would argue, unique element to be found in Italian SF is its explicit literariness and connection to the academic humanities. Curtoni, for example, is proud of what his *liceo classico* training and his university degree in literature has contributed to his SF writing (2000, 124). Many of the best early SF works of Italian SF were, in fact, by well-known, literary writers. Some of these writers—such as Primo Levi, Dino Buzzati, and Tommaso Landolfi—did not identify with SF per se; while others, who did so identify themselves, could well have been included in the world of “serious” literature, given their fantastic, surrealist, modernist, experimentalist narratives. Anna Rinonapoli, in her magnificent “Eroaldo o dell’estetica fantascientifica” (1963), for example, takes to task the academic elitism of Italian literary criticism, the field of pedagogy, Italian bureaucracy and nepotism, science-as-god, and even SF itself, all in one blow. Protagonist Eroaldo Banconi, a middle school literature teacher trying to win a *concorso* for a position with a higher salary, inhabits a smog-filled world in which living space and purified air are at a premium. We learn through his studying for the concorso’s exam that all literary texts are now interpreted through a scientific and “fantascientific” optic. He reads from books such as *Magia e conoscenza scientifica nei poemi omerici* and *Trionfo della scienza nelle Georgiche di Virgilio* (279), reviles the twentieth-century social realist detractors of SF, and notes how current Dante criticism mocks early Dantisti, who spent their time wondering what “Veltro” meant, when they could have been discussing the speed at which Dante was traveling through the Empyrean (the speed of sound, or of light?), and what Dante meant by *folgore*, given that he couldn’t have known about electromagnetism (287). Eroaldo adheres to the philosophy of one Goldenkatz, who believes robots are best fit to do all teaching and grading, that is until he learns that the assembly of examiners at the *concorso* are not fans of Goldenkatz, but rather those who follow the tenets of “freedom of personality” found in *fantapsicologia* and *fantapedagogia*. He quickly changes his tune, and gives a brilliant exposition on how Leopardi, in particular the poem “A Silvia,” represents the highest point on the “indice fantascientifico,” as it deals with time and loss in terms of possible universes. Eroaldo goes on to sing the praises of Carducci and Foscolo’s scientific insights, and those of many others. Eroaldo wins the *concorso*, switches pedagogical sides, and sees that his

beloved robots can be flawed due to *human* error and corruption. His belief that Italian schools “stunk of humanistic sin” (272) takes on a whole new meaning.

With a markedly different style, but a similarly playful, literary tone is Sandrelli’s, “Il suggeritrone” (1964a), which recounts the disastrous effects of a curious invention for actors. Pik Molander, to help his girlfriend become a better actress, invents a machine that can render anyone a superb thespian. The *suggeritrone* radiates into one’s mind scenes from the greatest past performances, such as the ones done by top-billed actors in “Othello” by the great Sheckley (!). Unfortunately, the *suggeritrone* goes awry and the entire city of Tappu begins to do nothing other than act parts from plays. Before long, the acting turns into reality, the fictional tragedies into real tragedies, and virtually the entire population is dead by murder or suicide.

Similarly filled with literary references is Vittorio Catani’s 1991 “Storia di Omero.” This Homer, like his namesake, returns from a voyage to find people eager to hear of his adventures. Quickly, though, it becomes clear that the three gorgeous young women (although they are referred to in the masculine) who affectionately greet him are not his family, nor even wholly human. They are synthetic humans, cyborgs, voracious for knowledge and experiences, which they absorb from humans in a rather graphic and fatal (for the human) way, quite literally “sirenic,” if you will.

Less unique to Italian SF narrative, but more prevalent, especially in the last few decades, is the plot structure (or some would consider a subgenre or mode) of *uchronia*, with its posing of the counterfactual question: what if the world had gone differently? Italian *uchronias* most often situate themselves in Italy’s glorious and inglorious past: the Middle Ages and Renaissance, or the Fascist period (sometimes both). Among the former, there are the excellent and numerous Inquisitor Eymerich novels by Valerio Evangelisti (ten published between 1994-2010) [Figure 40] that trace the cruel adventures of the tormented, ambitious, time-travelling Dominican inquisitor-*magus* from fourteenth-century Catalonia (Nicolau Aymerich); and Lanfranco Fabiani’s *Lungo i vicoli del tempo* (2002) [Figure 41], which includes a Leonardo da Vinci who invents a time machine and a Boccaccio at risk of moving to France and writing the *Decameron* in French.

Among the many *uchronias* set in the Fascist period—“fantascismo,” as Lippi has aptly put it (2005, 26)—a few notables are Mario Farneti’s ongoing *Occidente* series (which began in 2001), in which Fascism’s reign is rewritten (Mussolini never allies with Hitler, his regime never falls, and Italy is a superpower today) [Figure 42]; and Francesco Scalone’s eerie story “M. (mille mondi ancora)” (1999), in which the protagonist tries again and again throughout the “multiverse” to stop WWII from happening, but is repeatedly killed by the woman he comes to love, who makes sure the war does happen. Worthy of note is Luca Masali’s *I biplani d’Annunzio* (1996) [Figure 43], the highly regarded alternate history set partially in WWI, featuring a time-traveling pilot who moves between the nineteen-teens and the 1990s war in Bosnia. Covering all historical periods (some quite close to the present) is the wonderful collection edited by the scholar and author Gianfranco De Turris, *Se L’Italia* (2005). The anthology includes sixteen alternate LAWKIs (Life As We Know It) such as, what if Rome had been founded by Remus (by Fabio Calabrese), or if Dante hadn’t written the *Commedia* (by Giulio Leoni), or if Genovese bankers had funded Columbus’s discovery of America (by Andrea Angiolino and Paolo Corsini), or if the EU had been built fifteen years earlier

than it was (by Pierfrancesco Prosperi)? The new magazine *IF* (its name inspired by both a Kipling poem and the legendary US magazine *If*) has also recently dedicated an entire issue to alternate histories, its cover unmistakably evoking WWII [Figure 44]. These novels and short stories could be considered part of what the Wu Ming collective has termed the New Italian Epic, inasmuch as they actively participate in metahistorical fiction.²¹

While uchronias do not have to include time travel or parallel worlds by a character or characters, they often do. Time-related themes and literary devices are, of course, basic SF fare: FTL (Faster Than Light), warp, and jump drives; and mechanisms to transport people or information (often irrespective of all the frightening possible consequences of paradoxes that have been imagined in the wake of the theory of relativity: Schrödinger's cat and accidentally killing our grandfathers included). Perhaps an Italian's relationship to time is different from that of an American's in part because they live with thousands of years of history all around them; and in part because, at least until very recently, they lived with less of a sense of work-related time urgency (not that a slower-paced life does not contain its own stress factors). Narratives that include inexplicable loss of time, or time speeding up, certainly exist in Italian SF, although they seem to be not as common as other themes. Much can be gleaned about the desire to "slow down," in fact, from reading Dino Buzzati's 1954 SF short story, "The Time Machine." This time machine, unlike the usual kind of time machines, is an entire city outside of Grosseto built under Field "C" electrostatic radiation, which slows down time so that its inhabitants can live longer. All is well until an American scientist from Buffalo theorizes that if "Field C" broke somehow, the population would suddenly age much, much faster than those who had never come in contact with the Field. The risks of extending life, seeking immortality, and constructing utopias have been well rehearsed in SF. Buzzati's story, however, is a fascinating micro-examination of the particular desire many have to slow down time.

Another intriguing way Italian SF has used time can be found in Roberto Benatti's cyberpunk story "Traumazone" (2000). The narration is divided into sections with time headings, like a lab journal, in ten second intervals. The protagonist Ibrahim is attempting in his dream state to change history and, it would seem, free humanity from the Metasogno regime in which human bodies are stolen and consciousness is downloaded into a place in which it constantly dreams. The world has become a wasteland, and dreams are violent and deranged, not "everyday" dreams that fool us into thinking we are living in reality, like the ones in the *Matrix* films. Even with the English title of the story, "Traumazone," is hardly standard Hollywood fare. The end of Ibrahim's log, which comes precisely one minute after the narrative starts, is nothing short of a nightmare.

More pleasant dreams, however, are found in one of Lino Aldani's most beloved short stories, and one of the few Italian SF pieces to be published in English, "Buona notte, Sofia" (1963; English trans. 1964). Dreaming in this world is so pleasant, in fact, the entire human race (except for a few radical "Anti-Dream Leaguers") is addicted to it. The Oneirofilm Company creates these fantasy-dreams and then sells them in stores like records. Sofia Barlow, one of Oneirofilm's top actresses, begins to have doubts about her work and a life lived in dreams. Her boss, however, finds a clever way to bring her back

²¹ [Editors' note: on the Wu Ming collective see Fulginiti and Vito's "New Italian Epic: Un'Ipotesi Di Critica Letteraria, E D'Altro," as well as Vito's interview with Wu Ming 1 in this volume.]

on board. This early “media landscape” story, written in 1964 and filled with American names and locations is an imagining of a world in which people prefer, or are seduced into preferring, to live in the realm of virtual reality—perhaps indicative of Aldani’s view of Americans, more than that of Italians. On the other hand, Benatti’s “Traumazone,” written more than three decades later, depicts a globalized, or rather “post-globalized” world in which space-time traveling characters with biblical names and Kalashnikovs are violently forced into a world of nightmares.

Connected to questions of time is the subgenre called *fantarcheologia* (in English, pseudoarcheology or archeological SF), with its mysterious pylons, lost worlds, ancient tablets that turn out to be alien messages, and the like. The early Italian masters of this subgenre were Pier Domenico Colosimo (a.k.a Peter Kolosimo) and Luigi Rapuzzi (most commonly known by one of his pen-names, L. R. Johannis), although Colosimo’s writing is quite loosely associated with SF, and often arranged as collections of documents, rather than in narrative form. More esoteric (and “pseudo-science-y”) than other SFs, *fantarcheologia* is often associated with fantasy literature, although the boundaries between fantasy and SF certainly bleed where the esoteric is concerned. Evangelisti’s *Eymerich* novels are, again, a case in point.

Also devoted to aspects of the esoteric and occult were the earliest editor of Mondadori’s *Urania* book series and the founder of its magazine, Giorgio Monicelli and his companion, the SF writer Maria Teresa Maglione. Monicelli and Maglione established a column in the short-lived *Urania* magazine (1952-1953) called “Conosci te stesso” (an allusion, no doubt, to the writing on the temple to Apollo at Delphi, *gnothi seauton*), in which Maglione discussed predictions from the *I Ching*. While the magazine ended after fourteen issues, many of the esoteric interests of Monicelli and Maglione have remained quite alive in SF circles, and continue to this day.

Among the notable number of Italian SF works that contain esoterism is Antonio Piras’s 1998 story, “Esagrammi.” It, too, centers around the *I Ching*. Set in a dark, seedy, steampunk ambiance of circus performers, the story begins with the hexagram *ch’ien*, indicating creativity and perseverance, and in this case, a mutation. Five more hexagrams are “thrown” over the course of the story (hybridity, disintegration, contemplation, stimulation, and renovation), each time by the ancient Zoe, and then interpreted by the seer Piccolo, a small man deformed by progeria syndrome. Most of the world is now comprised of mutant humans, and the protagonist is too, although he does not know it yet. The bizarre people he meets—each associated with a hexagram—move him toward discovering his true nature and his life path. What makes this piece SF and not straight fantasy, or even horror, is the role that science played, and continues to play, in creating these mutants. Here, the esoteric offers the positive counter-force to the destructive power of science.

Less esoteric in themselves, but often interconnected with that sub-genre, are the Greco-Roman mythological references and conceits to be found in Italian SF narrative. Roberta Rambelli’s 1962 “Dialogo con il dio” is an excellent example of this tendency. The narrative focuses on the relationship between a primitive-seeming villager, Hank, and his god, a beautiful being from the Montagna Sacra who lives on a nearby hill above the village. The god and Hank speak nightly at the god’s house about the history of humanity, the universe, and particularly about machines. After a neighboring village, even less intellectually sophisticated than Hank’s but rich with grain and cattle, asks to

trade their supplies for Hank's god, the pantheon and the theogony are revealed, and they are far from what both clans of villagers ever anticipated: the god is a robot. The humility, wisdom, generosity, and humanity of the god, although a machine, ultimately foregrounds human ignorance, selfishness and the species' continual recourse to violence—that which the machine gods have been trying to disabuse us of for millennia.

Rambelli's story directly addresses the human relationship both to machines and to divinity. With respect to the latter, as mentioned earlier, Italian SF narrative is rich with references to religion, which is often central to SF plots. De Turre's 1964 "Il silenzio dell'universo," Aldani's 1982 "Quo vadis, Francisco?," Ferruccio Parazzoli's *La nudità e la spada* (1990), Ugo Bonanate's *Ascolta Israele* (1991), Giampietro Stocco's *Nuovo mondo* (2010), and Evangelisti's *Eymerich* (again!) are a few good examples. The engagements with organized religion, doctrine, God, and the afterlife take many forms, and reactions to the various facets of religious life and thought are equally varied. De Turre's astronaut experiences God and the universe as immense beauty and love; the characters in Stocco and Evangelisti's novels who face inquisitorial practices, not so much. In Aldani's story, a Christian missionary priest on a remote planet of decrepit inhabitants meets with intolerance when he refuses to fuse some of their less savory practices into his religion. The questions of whose beliefs are "right" or "better" comes in to play here, as in so many works of "social" SF.

With regard to the other relationship that Rambelli's story evoke—that of humans with machines—we are coming close to 2030, the year Vernor Vinge predicted the technological singularity would occur, that is, when computational machines will have more intelligence than humans do (1993). SF writers have been thinking about the machine, the cyborg, the robot, the automaton, the Frankenstein, the Golem, the Galatea—how to create them, what to do with them, and what the consequences of their existence might be—for a long time. Add to the mix the posthuman, the transhuman, prostheses, and bioengineering, and artificial life is looking less artificial. Sandrelli, for example, unsentimentally addressed the human-machine relationship in his story "La falce" (1962b; "The Scythe" [1976]). A group of astronauts land on a lonely, yet beautiful planet dotted with magnificent cities, vibrantly lit up, busy with trains and moving sidewalks, and every technological comfort humans, or any number of species, could ever want. Yet the cities are silent, devoid of people or other creatures. What is more, there is no trace whatsoever of the beings who constructed these cities ever having lived there. Much to the shock and dismay of the human visitors, it turns out that the life on the planet *is* the structures and machines.

When technology gains "consciousness," sentience, and volition (like HAL in Clarke's 1951 short story "The Sentinel" and Kubrick's 1968 film *2001*), or when humans act like machines (like Serafino Gubbio in Pirandello's 1916 *Si Gira!*), reality becomes unhinged for us, often for the worse, although sometimes for the better, as a few SF writers have imagined. An intriguing twist to this conundrum is Angelo Comino's short novel entitled *Il sogno di Eliza* (2001). Comino uses the pseudonym Motor to sign this cyberpunk narrative set in a miserable post-apocalyptic world filled with trash, toxins, insects, rodents, etc. But a little more reading and some research reveals that "Motor" is more than just a penname. Comino utilized a series of computer software products (Eliza 6.0.1, Alice, Idea Fisher 6.0, and a Dada engine text generator) and a variety of aleatory methods (cut-ups, *strategie oblique*, and an electronic *I Ching* [there it

is again!]) to create a generative environment/system in which the computer itself “wrote” the narrative, which itself ends up being about the human-machine relationship.²²

Continuing along the theme of “what it is to be human” and “alive” in SF we come across “fantabiological” narratives that investigate the manipulation of human life to make it more this or that, less this or that. Good examples in Italian SF narrative can be found in Primo Levi’s *Storie naturali* (1966), which has a number of pieces that look at topics ranging from cryogenics and test-tube babies to new drugs that can convert pleasure to pain and vice versa; and Franco Enna’s “L’ignoto intorno a noi” (1964), which explores the discovery of a substance that can turn people’s skin all the same color, thereby wiping out race distinctions (so it is hoped). While Levi’s tales focus more on the actual technicalities to the scientific *novum*, Enna’s spotlights the discoverer of this substance who, it turns out, is not fully human, although he passes as one of us. Enna’s seems to be the more common mode of engaging biological issues in Italian SF. Laura Pugno’s 2007 *Sirene*, like Enna, focuses more on the psychology of humans in the process of being transformed, than on the technical details of the transformation.²³ In her extremely graphic narrative, humans are living in a world in which even a small amount of contact with the sun causes a vicious cancer, and the only source for salvation is, it seems, something in mermaids’ bodies. Initially, mermaids are prized (and brutalized) for their beauty and sexuality, then for their meat, and eventually for what other benefits they can offer humans. While it is not clear what will happen as the novel ends, the protagonist successfully mates with a mermaid, then with their daughter, creating a new species.

Calvino’s *Cosmicomiche* could seem part of this fantabiological subgenre, as it tracks Qfwfq’s evolution and experiences from the beginning of the universe through the present. I would argue, however, that science is not actually being used to create *nova* in the stories, but rather is what is being anthropomorphized. The *Cosmicomics* read more like origin myths than tales of the future, or of alternate pasts and presents.

The other kind of life that finds its way into SF is, of course, alien. The valence of aliens in Italian SF is generally positive—quite different overall from that of early US genre SF. This may be due in part to the late start that Italian writers had with respect to the US, when fears of aliens were being replaced with more imminent fears of nuclear holocaust. It may be due to Italian writers’ unconscious desire not to think about “alien invaders,” after centuries of invasions by foreign dominators; or maybe it was a recognition that Italy as a nation was not in a position to colonize the world, much less other planets and life forms. When there are aliens in Italian SF they often are kind, smart, and helpful, and rarely are they depicted as BEMs (Bug-Eyed Monsters). In L. R. Johannis 1958 “Tre terrestri e un marziano,” for example, a charismatic Martian named Freddy Smith explains that the great things that have happened, been discovered, or built on Earth are due to Martians, who have been living among humans for a long time out of compassion and a sort of social service. That said, Freddy doesn’t expect anyone to believe him, especially given that so many people have actually seen their flying saucers,

²² Unfortunately, the website (<http://www.ilsognodelizia.com>) on which Comino had posted this information is no longer functioning.

²³ [Editors’ note: on Pugno’s *Sirene*, see Robert Rushing’s “Sirens without Us: The Future After Humanity” in this volume.]

but don't think they did (and this story was written before Fruttero's famous Lucca comment!).

In a more solemn, poetic vision of aliens, Rinonapoli's short story, "Metamorfosi cosmica" (1986) describes a planet of extraordinary beings that are better than humans ever have been, or may ever be. They are like large birds with iridescent feathers, golden hands and gentle eyes. There is no violence in their society, nor any technology, and everything they do, they do with their minds (build things, mate, etc.). These loving creatures welcome the human scientists who are there to study them, making the scientists' work easy by learning human language, arts, and sciences instantly. Like *Sirene*, the story concludes with a co-species birth (here, though, it is a psychic genetic engineering), and the hope that humans might benefit from breeding with this great life form.

Similarly, Renato Pestriniero's "Una fossa grande come il cielo" (1978) has an alien that exudes love, beauty, and happiness. An astronaut falls down a pit on an alien planet and realizes he is hurt, unable to climb back out, and is quickly running out of oxygen. As he is dying, a being appears to him first as a light, then as tree that hugs him, then in vaguely humanoid form. They communicate through thought, and the astronaut learns that he is the first "alien" to open his heart to a being on this planet; as such, the being is thrilled. The being is also dying, as he was badly burned by the exhaust of the human's spaceship while it was landing. The two die together, with hands intertwined and at peace. When the astronaut's shipmates find him, they see the alien creature. One shoots it, thinking it killed their companion; the other notes that it is sitting beside their companion, holding his hand, and wonders.

Two more good-natured aliens can be found in Aldani's "Screziato di Rosso" (1977) and Montanari's "Carne di stato" (1978). Aldani's is a dignified, gigantic black man with red hair and striking attire. Montanari's aliens are giant worms, whose bodies (like those of the mermaids in Pugno's *Sirene*) seem to have miraculous properties. In Aldani's story, the alien is from the future, and has landed in the small town of Cascina Torti to invite volunteers to come with him for some experiments (a former prostitute and an autistic man happily sign up). The alien has the upper hand, but does nothing to harm anyone, only keeps them in place while discussing whether someone will come with him. In Montanari's story, on the other hand, human scientists seem to have the upper hand, but a number of the humans who are unwittingly being used as guinea pigs in the worm research end up choosing to live their lives with the aliens.

Perhaps the existence of a city like Venice has something to do with the plethora of aliens (kind and otherwise) in Italian SF.²⁴ Fabio Calabrese calls Venice a "disquieting, magic town subtly linked to another dimension of time and space" (1985, 51). Author A. E. van Vogt says that Venetians, in their galaxy of islands, are aliens that look like humans (1996, 7). Many Italian SF writers, in fact, hail from Venice: Renato Pestriniero, Sandro Sandrelli, Carlo della Corte, Paolo Lanzotti, and Tiziano Scarpa, to name a few. Calvino's *Città invisibili*—the text by this author which I believe comes closest to containing moments of SF—is a garland of strange cityscapes inspired precisely by Venice.

²⁴ [Editors' note: on the future and Venice, see Shaul Bassi's essay, "Sì, doman: il futuro di Venezia tra incanto e disincanto" in this volume.]

Another city that has been a recent locus for Italian SF writing is Siena. In 2005, a group of Italian SF writers, critics, artists, and fans met at the Hotel Athena for the first “Week End della Contrada delle Stelle,” organized by SF writer Carlo Agricoli. A number of odd things happened at the hotel, especially, it seems, with regard to the eighth floor. The group thus decided to have a reunion the following year, with each member contributing a short story set in this Sienese building. The result, edited by Ugo Malaguti and published by the Bolognese press Elara, is *Il mistero dell’ottavo piano* (2009). Daniele Vecchi’s “L’ottavo piano dalle finestre nere,” for example, tells of a group of guests who are roomed on the eighth floor of the hotel by a new staff member. The hotel manager is irate when he finds out, as the eighth floor is off-limits to guests (it turns out to be some sort of spatial-temporal portal). In the end, the disappeared guests are retrieved, and the manager’s fury and fear is abated, not so much because they were found, but because he learns that the group consisted of SF writers. He deduces (rightly!) that if they talk or write about their adventure, no one will ever believe them.

Lucca, Siena, Venice, Cascina Torti: in fact, small towns have had a notable presence in Italian SF, contrary to what Fruttero theorized. And while we’re pointing out cities, we can add Florence and Pisa to the list, as can be seen in Michelangelo Miani’s cover illustration for the anthology of Italian SF entitled *Pianeta Italia* [Figure 46], Maurizio Manzieri’s cover for Millemondi’s anthology *Strani giorni* [Figure 47], and Paolo Barbieri’s cover for Lanfranco Fabriani’s *Lungo i vicoli del tempo* [see Figure 41]. On *Pianeta Italia* we see a David floating in galactic space with an open chest revealing what looks like docking port, and a robot/space ship coming in to land. Another space ship brushes the mammoth figure’s left arm. On *Strani giorni*’s cover, Pisa’s famous architecture is surrounded by a golden futuristic city, complete with a parked spaceship. *Lungo i vicoli del tempo*’s cover sports Florence’s Palazzo Vecchio and the Duomo. Few book or magazine covers of Italian SF have such blatant signs of *italianità* on them (Mongai’s being one of those few, [see Figure 39]), perhaps because of the smiles they provoke, whether intentional or not. Much less a celebration of Italy and its positively valenced stereotypical tropes is the magazine *IF*’s striking cover by Franco Brambilla for the special issue on uchronia [Figure 44], with its chilling references to the Fascist and Nazi regimes.

IF’s cover aside, humor has always been part of SF, and Italian SF certainly has its share. A notable piece worth mentioning is Primo Levi and Piero Bianucci’s “Le fan di spot di Delta Cephei” first published in *Astronomia* in 1986. Levi commenced the collaboration, with a letter in the voice of a female “fan” from the planet Delta Cephei to the science journalist Bianucci. Bianucci had—in real life—recently talked on television about the constellation Cepheus, about 2400 light years from Earth. The fan and her girlfriends were thrilled about this, as they had been watching Earth t.v. for some time, especially enjoying commercials about canned tomatoes. The fan goes on to describe her planet, the men on her planet (they look like asparagus, are quite cheap to purchase, and are easily discarded after mating), and the fact that they saw a supernova explode in Earth’s galaxy in the constellation of Scorpio. Bianucci kindly replies, happy to hear that women rule there, and notably, gives little airtime to the supernova event. The fan writes again, this time asking for the recipes for all kinds of “anti” things, such as *antifermentativi*, *antiparassitari*, *anticoncezionali*, *antisemiti*, *antiquari*, *antitesi*, *antilopi*, etc. (167). In his response, Bianucci begins to wonder how he could be receiving the

fan's letters, given a tachyonic universe in which letters would arrive before any fans exist. In a final comment, Bianucci notes that in such a universe, awards would come before books were written, as they do (he implies) in Italy. This wink, of course, opens a whole new can of worms (or rather, wormholes), regarding the Italian publishing industry.

While not central to Levi and Bianucci's exchange, issues of gender and sexuality do emerge here, as they do in much SF narrative around the world from the 60s onward. In its early years, most SF was "gendered" as male—mainly men writing for men.²⁵ Often these male narratives include "generating" mechanical and biological life forms not born from women, existing in a world for the most part without women. Early genre SF, for the most part, includes few women protagonists or complex characters, not to mention writers or fans. This is worthy of note given the sexualized, superficial roles women have always played in visual forms of SF, especially comic books and films. Later SF narrative—beginning in the 1960s, however, is another story, with SF now being written by women and/or centered on issues of gender and sexuality. Italian SF narrative, perhaps because it began later than US SF, has had and continues to have a strong presence of women writers and characters. Additionally, Italy's strain of feminism, which fought for women's equality through highlighting their difference from men (not attempting to be equal to and the same as men) may also have something to do with it, allowing women the freedom to write SF as they saw fit. But even before the feminist revolutions of the 60s and 70s, there were prominent Italian women SF writers: Lina Gerelli (Monicelli's partner), who took primarily female pennames—Gerelli's was Elizabeth Stern—and had a large influence on SF publishing in the early years; Gilda Musa, also a veteran voice of Italian SF was there at the beginning, publishing and editing volumes of SF with her husband Inisero Cremaschi; Anna Rinonapoli and Roberta Rambelli—even if the latter often chose male pseudonyms—were highly prolific, and there were many others, as can be seen in a special issue of *Delos Science Fiction* (Treanni 2009) dedicated to the women of Italian SF, and the short-lived but wonderful Italian women SF writers magazine, *Ala*. Some of today's most beloved Italian SF writers are also women, such as Daniela Piegai, Clelia Farris, Nicoletta Vallorani, Elisabetta Vernier, and Milena Debenedetti. And an anthology of Italian women SF writers, entitled *Donne al futuro* (Emiliano 2005), shows that even if women still do not comprise the majority of Italian SF writers (or readers), their presence is remarkably strong.

Even so, Italian SF narrative—like film, comic books, and video games—is hardly free from the use of women as sexualized objects (and the magazine *Poker d'Assi*'s anthology *Il fantaerotismo: amore e morte fra le stelle* is but an extreme example [Ghiringhelli 1968]), though today, much SF includes transsexual, transgender, and gay bodies for the same purposes. Whether the bodies are human, cyborg, or all machine, certain strains of Italian SF revel in the gazing at, using, or abusing of sexualized forms. In terms of the exploited female body, scenes from Francesco Dimitri's *Alice nel paese della vaporità* (2010) are among the most horrific I have read in a while, but interestingly, the gay male protagonist telling the tale of this new Alice in a post-apocalyptic alternate world eventually discovers he *is* Alice, and a waterfall of gender issues cascades. A short cyberpunk story by Alberto Henriët, "Visioni di Zang" (1999) also has a gay male protagonist (with blue skin and artificial eyes, working as an

²⁵ On women SF writers see, for example, Aldiss (1986); Donawerth (1997); and Yaszek (2008).

“aesthetic terrorist” no less) who lives in a horrific slum zone with all forms of violence as the norm, where men are as objectified and exploited as women. The same goes for the male and female B-humans (lower “grade” humans) in the crisis-riddled, post-capitalist world of Catani’s *Quinto principio* (2009) [Figure 48]. Also highly disturbing reads with regard to gender and sexuality are Lorenzo Bartoli’s (pseudonym, Akira Mishima) cyberpunk/splatter *Bambole: Un romanzo di cybersex* (1996) [Figure 38] and Francesco Verso’s *E-doll* (2009) [Fig 49], which won the Premio Urania in 2008. Unnerving and revolting as many of these violent narratives are, some stand as important critiques of modern violence and gender/sexual inequality and identity.

With such extreme visions of human moral dissolution, where does one go from here? Paralleling these hells are those unleashed from environmental disaster. This is not, of course, a new theme. Since the atomic bomb we have realized how easy it is to destroy ourselves and our world. Maybe the future died at Hiroshima, given the bleak prognosis for the planet and the human race after something that massive. Italian SF, like all SF, imagines worlds on the edge of complete collapse; as well as destroyed worlds in which life has to take on different forms, and the beings who remain need to behave in different ways to survive. In many instances, humans are the culprits in this degradation. Enzo Fileno Carabba’s “Il buio” (1997), for example, imagines a human-destroyed world where there is no sun and increasingly many humans are adapting into sad, scavenging, reptile-like creatures that can see in the dark. Anna Feruglio Dal Dan also imagines a dark night world, a future London, in which there is no electricity left until the sudden arrival of mysterious alien beings, so bright they blind (“And This Also Has Been One of the Dark Places of the Earth”; 2009). The people of Pino Corrias’s “Benzodiazepine” (2008) live in a world literally melting from heat, blackouts, and chaos. One of the only salvations is drugs like MarleneBlue that hypnotize, eroticize pain, and give beautiful dreams. Narratives that explore the impact of the ecomafia (De Matteo’s “L’orizzonte di Riemann”; 2010) and ecofascism (Masali’s “La balena del cielo,” 1997) also abound, with few pastoral ecotopias anywhere in sight.

Drug-induced or digitally-induced realities are common in SF, especially amphetamines in the harsh worlds of cyberpunk (and psychedelic drugs with the earlier New Wave), with madness often a consequence, and even a goal, of too much interfacing with neural enhancers or modes of psychic transport. An Italian SF group that has often engaged such themes, but has done so with intentionality and self-awareness is Connettivismo. Inspired by van Vogt’s Nexialism and by cyberpunk aesthetic, Connettivismo began in 2004. The group, composed of SF authors Sandro Battisti (a.k.a Pykmil), Giovanni De Matteo (a.k.a X), and Marco Milani (a.k.a Zoon) produces a well-designed online bulletin called NeXT Station, a webzine called *NeXT*, and a magazine in English called *NeXT International* (<http://www.next-station.org/>) all of which promote a form of writing that is about the “continual flux of becoming.” Their ten-point manifesto begins in Marinettian fashion (even extending to direct verbal imitation): “We will sing of the resurrection of the soul consumed by technolog. The night, dreams, vision, and connection. And all that which sublimizes out souls to a superior order of consciousness” (<http://www.next-station.org/nxt-ex-1.shtml>). Like modern day Giordano Brunos, they claim to know no frontiers; to be everywhere and to be everything. The authors of Connettivismo have had great success, such as De Matteo’s Premio Urania for *Sezione π^2* (2007) [Figure 50]. In this novel, agents of the π^2 police team (Sezione Investigativa

Speciale di Polizia Psicografica) of Naples can scan recently dead victims' memories to find out about the circumstances of the death. On the surface, the Naples of 2059 is not, however, much unlike that of today, riddled with organized crime and trash. The *nova* of the narrative are the investigative techniques (evocative of although not identical to those in P. K. Dick's long short story "Minority Report") and the powers of nanotechnology and quantum computing, post-singularity. One could say the *nova* are also found in the narrative's sharp, experimental writing.

In contrast to the permeability and flux creed of Connettivismo and other crossover SF subgenres, is author Claudio Asciuti's hope that SF will not lose itself entirely. In 2000 he wrote a plea in the then newly-founded print magazine *Carmilla*, urging writers to stop selling out to market pressures, crossover tendencies, and fast and sloppy writing (partially caused by self-publishing and online blogs), thereby sacrificing the unique character of the genre. He also encouraged writers to stop thinking of themselves as living in a ghetto (hence the need to "escape") and enter, instead, a *shtetl* (a pious Jewish community). Asciuti wishes to empower SF writers to continue writing genre-based fiction. The Connettivisti, it seems, wish to do the same, although their vision of where the boundaries of genre SF lie is quite different. I do not expect either model will "win" out over the other, but that conventional genre SF writing and more "inter-genre" SF writing will continue in tandem.

Futures

In 2002, Giuseppe Iannozzi, editor of the fansite and fanzine *Intercom*, wrote a "Manifesto (virtuale) per una fantascienza moderna" pointing out what SF needed to do to keep itself alive and well (2002a). Among his suggestions were renewing its vocabulary and style; treating more problems related to politics, social issues, religion, and philosophy; not copying US writers; daring more and striving more; and focusing more on the human soul; forgetting technology and science, as such, because these are already "futuro nel tempo presente."

More recently, Carmine Treanni posed a few queries to Italian SF authors: what their thoughts were on the current state of SF in Italy, and what they supposed could be done to improve its readership, as well as encourage its writers (2010a). On Delos's website he posted twelve responses (*ibid.*).²⁶ Many of the obstacles noted by the authors interviewed are ones already discussed in this essay, such as continued problems with the publishing world, Italy's continued scarce funding for scientific research; a continued prejudice on the part of Italian readers against Italian authors; and an ongoing preference by Italian readers for realism, horror, mystery, and fantasy. But they also note other challenges, such as the fact that there are fewer readers of any kind of literature in Italy (even though literacy is high) and that even though SF cinema, SF television series, and SF gaming have many enthusiasts, it has not followed that these same people become writers of SF, or even readers. Silvio Sosio, editor of Delos Books, notes that SF readership has, if

²⁶ The responses posted were by Luca Masali, Milena Debenedetti, Paolo Lanzotti, Laura Iuorio, Bruno Vitiello, Donato Altomare, Lanfranco Fabriani, Alessandro Fambrini, Giampietro Stocco, Giovanni De Matteo, Dario Tonani, and Vittorio Catani.

anything, decreased.²⁷ In August of 2000 the website fantascienza.com did an online survey of SF readers and found that their median age was 35-40. The website and Delos Books did the survey five years later (March 2006) and found that the median age was now 40-45: the same readers, five years older. He estimates that fewer than 10,000 people in Italy today would identify themselves as SF readers.

This dearth of and even decline in SF readership could actually be due, in part, to the easy access to visual SF (film, t.v., computer), and to the perception that reading SF is somehow nerdier than watching it. The interviewed writers suggest changing the genre to something more up-to-date (such as “fantanoir”) or to something that emphasizes fantasy, a more general “alternate fiction” genre, and one that seems to sell more in Italy. The term “science” itself, many of the writers interviewed noted, has taken on a different status in the twenty-first century, as so much technoscience has become part of our daily lives. Having an entire genre built around “science” seems, in fact, to make less sense these days. A few writers also mention that factionalism among SF authors and publishing communities risks holding SF back. All agree, however, that if writers do not write well or originally, and if they do not write enough, Italian SF narrative cannot possibly move forward or gain a presence internationally.

On the other hand, many of the writers who responded to Treanni’s questions also see the present as an excellent moment for SF in Italy, with more big-name publishing houses publishing SF narrative in general, and Italian SF specifically. There are more Italian SF awards being given in Italy than ever,²⁸ and award-winning Italian SF titles are selling as many copies as award-winning titles by US authors (Treanni 2009). There are new magazines such as *Altrisogni* by dbooks [Figure 51] and *IF*, edited by Carlo Bordoni [Figure 44]; more venues for self-publishing; and emerging collectives such as the Connettivisti. SF is now being published by all major publishers, although for marketing purposes it may not be labeled as such (De Turre 1995, 229). And, if any group of writers is on the cutting edge of new publishing and promotional strategies, it is SF writers.

The challenges Italy faced in the twentieth century and the numerous obstacles early Italian SF writers encountered were the very nutrients that enriched the growth of Italian SF’s unique, highly humanistic and human corpus. Italy’s current SF, with the global techno-village and all the publication strictures that have loosened, is becoming more a part of a world-wide discourse, readily engaging in what great SF around the world has always done and continues to do: sound the warning cries for the potential socio-

²⁷ Silvio Sosio, personal communication, February 27, 2011.

²⁸ There are numerous awards in Italy for SF written by Italian authors. The Premio Italia has been running since 1972 (the first winner was Piero Prosperi for his novel *Autocrisi*) in various forms with various criteria, and is now usually given at Italcon (Convegno Italiano del Fantastico e della Fantascienza). The *Urania* publicationbook series started giving an annual prize (Premio Urania) in 1989, with Catani’s *Gli universi di Moras*, as the first winner. The Premio Cosmo from the publisher Nord ran from 1990-1996. The Premio Alien for a short story ran from 1994-2006. Fanucci’s Premio Solaria lasted only one year (1999-2000). The Premio Giulio Verne (previously, Premio Apuliacon) for a short story has been running since 2003. Since 2004 Delos Books, picking up where *Robot* magazine left off, has been giving the Premio Robot for the best short story in the “fantastic” (SF, fantasy horror) genre. In 2009 Delos also began the Premio Letterario Odissea for a “fantastic” novel, and they gave the first to Clelia Farris for *Nessun uomo è mio fratello*. Another well-known group of awards are given by Kipple Officina Letteraria.

economic, psychological, and environmental disasters possible in the near future; and even imagine possible alternatives.

Coda: An Alternate Future

E. B. Johnson, in “A Brief History of Alternate Fiction” states that “the actual roots of AF (alternate fiction) as a major distinct literary genre are not American, British, or even French, but Italian, or, to be more exact, Sicilian” (1997, 13-15). This assertion, offered in the opening remarks at the Twelfth Biannual Alternate Fiction Writers Association Symposium (Santa Cruz, 1996) turns out, alas, to be an amusing alternate fiction itself. Johnson re-imagines the beginnings of AF (which is, in his talk, SF) as one in which Luigi Pirandello is its “Father,” not Hugo Gernsback. In Johnson’s history, Pirandello starts out as an instructor in an all-women’s teacher’s college in Rome. He has a crazy wife and a ruined family business in sulfur mining; he is in love with a German woman; and he is friends with Mussolini, who is an aspiring actor and playwright starring in some of Pirandello’s plays. Gino Molinari is Fascism’s leader. In 1918 everything collapses and Pirandello leaves for NYC. There he reconnects with the German woman, works at Gernsback’s radio station, writes the “novel” *Six Characters*, becomes *persona non grata* in Fascist Italy, and receives citizenship in the US. He becomes the fiction editor for *Science and Invention*, but decides to call the developing genre “alternate fiction,” instead of what Gernsback wanted to call it, “scientifiction.” The best works in AF are, consequently, awarded the Luigi (instead of the Hugo).

While Johnson’s satirical placement of Pirandello as SF’s founder furthers the notion that the most unlikely of nations to produce SF is Italy (and Sicily, the most unlikely of all regions), he also suggests recasting the boundaries of SF by subsuming it under the more general category of AF, a genre (if we can call it that) in which Pirandello did actively participate. By shaking a stick at the strictures of genre SF—its founders and its gate-keepers—Johnson’s remarks were and are, quite literally, an opening.

Appendix I
*Italian Authors in English Language Anthologies of Short Stories*²⁹

There are no Italian authors included in the following large, well-known collections in English of SF short stories, listed chronologically:

Campbell, John W., ed. *The Astounding Science Fiction Anthology* (1952)
Wollheim, Donald A. and Terry Carr, eds. *The World's Best Science Fiction* collections (1965-1971)
Cerf, Christopher, ed. *The Vintage Anthology of Science Fantasy* (1966)
Ellison, Harlan, ed. *Dangerous Visions* (1967, 2002)
Silberberg, Robert, ed. *The Mirror of Infinity* (1970)
Wollheim, Donald A. and Arthur W. Saha, eds. *The Annual World's Best SF* collections (1972-1990)
Asimov, Isaac, ed. *Before the Golden Age* (1974)
Rabkin, Eric, ed. *Science Fiction* (1983)
The Year's Best Science Fiction collections (1984-)
Sterling, Bruce, ed. *Mirrorshades* (1986)
Le Guin, Ursula K. and Brian Atterby, eds. *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (1993)
Haining, Peter, ed. *Time Travelers. Fiction in the Fourth Dimension* (1997)
Card, Orson Scott, ed. *Masterpieces: The Best Science Fiction of the 20th Century* (2004)
Kelly, James Patrick, and John Kessel, eds. *Rewired: The Post Cyberpunk Anthology* (2007)
Booker, M. Keith, and Anne-Marie Thomas, eds. *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009)
Masri, Heather ed. *Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts* (2009)

Among the few well-known anthologies in English that *do* include Italian authors are the following, also listed chronologically, followed by the author(s) they include:

Rottensteiner, Franz ed. *View From Another Shore* (1973)
-Lino Aldani
Wollheim, Donald A., ed. *The Best from the Rest of the World: European Science Fiction* (1976)
-Sandro Sandrelli, Luigi Cozzi
Nolane, Richard D., ed. *Terra SF: The Year's Best European SF* (1981)
-Gianni Montanari, Lino Aldani
---, ed. *Terra SF: The Year's Best European SF II* (1983)
-Gianluigi Zuddas
Aldiss, Brian, and Sam Lundwall, ed. *The Penguin World Omnibus of Science Fiction* (1986)
-Lino Aldani
Hartwell, David G., ed. *The World Treasury of Science Fiction* (1989)
-Italo Calvino
---, ed. *The Science Fiction Century* (1997)

²⁹ Full bibliographic information for each item in Appendices I and II is found in the Bibliography below.

-Lino Aldani, Dino Buzzati
Morrow, James and Kathryn Morrow, eds. *The SFWA European Hall of Fame* (2007)
-Valerio Evangelisti

Appendix II
Italian Authors Included in Encyclopedias and Dictionaries of Science Fiction, or
Collections of Critical Studies of World Science Fiction

James Gunn's *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1988) does not include Italian authors; nor does Brian Stableford's *The Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Literature* (2004), although it does include a reference to one critical essay on Italian SF in its bibliography; nor does Donald A. Westfahl's three volume *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2005). John Clute and Peter Nicholls' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993), however, does.

With regard to collections of critical essays, the following, for example, do not include Italian authors: Mark Bould, et. al., ed., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009); James Gunn, et al., ed., *Reading Science Fiction* (2009); and the *NYRSF* (*New York Review of Science Fiction*), which has been publishing essays on SF since 1988 and has over 4600. The *Anatomy of Wonder* edited by Neil Barron (1981), on the other hand, does briefly discuss Italian SF, as does Gary Wolfe's *Science Fiction Dialogues* (1982), although only in a single paragraph (p. 207) thanks to a contribution by Inisero Cremaschi.

Appendix III
Information on Italian Science Fiction Book Series, Magazines, and Newsstand Series

Mauro Catoni's website *SF quadrant* chronologically lists Italian SF book series and magazines from 1952 through 2003. The list also includes publishers and editors, as well as details about individual publications: <http://www.sfquadrant.com/Edizioni%20SF/editalgenerale.htm>. See also the the extensive and growing "Catalogo Vegetti della Letteratura Fantastica," begun by Ernesto Vegetti as the "Catalogo of SF, Fantasy e Horror" in 1998 and continued by a large group of collaborators: <http://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/#cerca=index.htm>. See also the website *Il Prontuario della Fantascienza Italiana*, which offers a list of magazines, newsstand series, and fanzines: <http://web.tiscalinet.it/fantascienzaitaliana/riviste/index.html>.

The First SF Magazine Published in Italy
Scienza fantastica (Rome: Krator, 1952-1953)

Longest Running Magazines / Series (issues /volumes in the hundreds or in *Urania's* case, thousands)
Urania (Milan: Mondadori, 1952 -)

Cosmo oro (Milan: Nord, 1970 -)
Millemondi (Milan: Mondadori, 1971 -)
Fantacollana (Milan: Nord, 1973 -)
Il libro d'oro della fantascienza (Rome: Fanucci, 1978 -)
*Nova SF** (Bologna: Libra, 1967-1980; Bologna: Perseo/Elara, 1985 -)

Magazines / Series with High Numbers of Issues / Volumes

I romanzi del cosmo (Milan: Ponzoni, 1957-1967. 201 issues)
Oltre il cielo (Rome: Esse, 1957-1975. 155 issues)
Galaxy (Milan: Due Mondi and Piacenza: CELT, 1958-1964. 70 issues)
Galassia (Piacenza: La Tribuna 1961-1979. 237 issues)
Cosmo (Milan: Ponzoni, 1961-1967. 100 issues)
SFBC (Science Fiction Book Club) (Piacenza: CELT, 1963-1979. 48 vols.)
*Nova SF** (Bologna: Libra, 1967-1980. 43 issues)
Slan (Bologna: Libra, 1968-1982. 73 issues)
I classici della fantascienza (Bologna: Libra, 1969-1982. 72 issues)
Bigalassia (Piacenza: CELT, 1970-1978. 45 issues)
Cosmo argento (Milan: Nord, 1970-2006. 322 issues)
Futuro biblioteca (Rome: Fanucci, 1973-1981. 50 issues)
Oscar fantascienza (Milan: Mondadori. 43 vols.)
SF narrativa d'anticipazione (Milan: Nord, 1973-1989. 46 issues)
Classici fantascienza / Classici Urania (Milan: Mondadori, 1977-2002. 309 issues)
Oscar fantascienza (Milan: Mondadori, 1979-1989. 78 vols.)
I massimi della fantascienza (Milan: Mondadori, 1983-2000. 41 issues)
Biblioteca di fantascienza (Rome: Fanucci, 1988-1996. 43 issues)
Tascabili fantascienza (Milan: Nord, 1991-1998. 48 issues)
Il fantastico economico classico (Rome: Compagnia del Fantastico, 1994-1996. 50 issues)

Early SF Magazines and Series Primarily Dedicated to Italian SF

I Narratori dell'Alpha Tau (Rome: Irsa Muraro, 1957. 9 issues)
Giro planetario (Rome: Sanucci, 1961. 8 issues)
Futuro (Rome: Editoriale Futuro, 1963-1964. 8 issues)
Constellation (Rome: International Continental, 1971-1972. 10 issues)

Early SF Magazines and Series that Published Italian SF More Than Occasionally

Scienza fantastica (Rome: Krator, 1952-1953. 7 issues)
Galassia (Udine: Galassia, 1957. 5 issues) (Piacenza: La Tribuna. 1961-1979. 237 issues)
I Romanzi del cosmo (Milan: Ponzoni, 1957-1967. 201 issues)
Cronache del futuro (Rome: Kappa, 1957-1958. 24 issues)
Oltre il cielo (Rome: Esse, 1957-1975. 155 issues)
Gamma (Milan: Edizioni Gamma [issues 1-5]; Milan: Edizioni dello Scorpione [issues 6-27], 1965-1968. 27 issues)
Interplanet (Piacenza: CELT [issues 1-4]; Turin: Edizioni dell'Albero [issues 5-7], 1962-1965)
*Nova SF** (Bologna: Libra, 1967-1980. 43 issues)

Andromeda (Milan: Dall'Oglio, 1972-1975. 18 issues)

Robot (Milan: Armenia, 1976-1979. 40 issues)

Publishing Houses that Currently Focus on SF, or Have a Major Series in SF

Delos (Milan)

Edizioni della Vigna (Milan)

Elara (formerly Libra and then Perseo, Bologna)

Fanucci (Rome)

Hypnos (Milan)

Kipple (Genoa)

Mondadori (Milan—books and series under *Urania*, as well as other imprints)

Nord (Milan)

Solfanelli (Chieti)

*two presses that previously published SF have recently stopped doing so: Armenia (Milan) and ShaKe (Milan)

More Recent Magazines and Series that Publish Italian SF (along with World SF and other genres)

Futuro Europa (Bologna: Elara, 1988-)

Delos Science Fiction (Milan: Delos Books, online 1996- , print 2008-)

Carmilla (online 2000-, print 2000-)

Robot (revived from 1979; Milan: Delos Books, 2003 -)

IF (Chieti: Solfanelli, 2009-)

Altrisogni (www.dbooks.it, 2010-)

Appendix IV

Lists of Pseudonyms Used by Italian SF Authors

-Fantascienza.com: <http://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/E0000.htm#00000>

-Fantabancarella: <http://www.fantabancarella.com/pseudo.html>

-Gianni Pilo's *Catalogo generale della fantascienza in Italia, 1930-1979* (1980)

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6: Websites

The most comprehensive SF website in Italy is *Fantascienza.com*, which also contains the *Catalogo Vegetti della letteratura fantastica*:
<http://www.fantascienza.com/catalogo/#cerca=index.htm>, formerly known as the Catalogo SF, Fantasy e Horror: <http://www.catalogovegetti.com/catalogo/>.

7: Other excellent sites:

- Carmilla* (both the webzine and information on how to obtain the magazine):
<http://www.carmillaonline.com/>
- Continuum*: <http://continuum.altervista.org/>
- Fantabancarella*: <http://www.fantabancarella.com/index.html>

- Fantascienza.net*: <http://www.fantascienza.net/>
- IntercoM Science Fiction Station*: <http://www.intercom-sf.com/>
- Italcon*: <http://www.fantascienza.com/italcon/>
- Mondo Urania*: <http://www.mondourania.com/index.htm>
- NeXT Station*: <http://www.next-station.org/>
- Nigra Latebra*: <http://www.nigralatebra.it/index.htm>
- SF quadrant*: <http://www.sfquadrant.com/>
- Urania Mania*: <http://www.uraniamania.com/>