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Virginia Woolf in fascist Italy

The Italian translations of *Flush*, *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*

Abstract

This paper analyzes the editorial history of the Italian translations of *Orlando*, *Flush* and *To the Lighthouse* published during the fascist regime. Furthermore, it analyzes those very translations to highlight how the translators' choices have been influenced by the economic element of the editorial market. If the editorial history points out the importance of the commercial success of the books in the publishing industry, the analysis of the translation evidences how much the translator could be influenced by literary critics and most of all by the economic power of the editorial market, some translation choices apparently dictated only by the need to sell copies. Finally, the absence (total in Celenza's case) of any in-depth introduction, preface, translator's note or comment about the text and author seem to indicate the translators' strategy: on the one hand, to recreate the illusion of the original speaking to its new public; on the other, to disguise the presence of unwelcome topics under the apparent flow and simplification of the text in order to spare the book from the attention of fascist censorship.

1 Introduction

Virginia Woolf arrives in Italy in the thirties, particularly at a time of regime recrudescence against women emancipation fighting, with stricter control over women associations and restrictions over their right to work, even sport, under the main principle "that nothing distract woman from her fundamental mission: MATERNITY" (De Grazia 1992: 219).

Apparently, an author such as Woolf seems to be out of place in the cultural context of fascist Italy, and her presence to be ascribed only to the unquestionable literary value of her books which made her cross the borders of the Italian literary system despite Mussolini and his propaganda against women and foreigners. But if we consider the books that have been translated, and their success in terms of sold copies, it could be argued that other elements have exerted their influence over the selection. In fact, the first Italian translation of the author's books is *Orlando*, in 1933, followed, one year later by *Flush – a Biography*, both published by Mondadori and translated by Alessandra Scalero. In the same year, 1934, Giulia Celenza translated *To the Lighthouse* for Treves. Translator of Stevenson and Shakespeare, Celenza was a highly reputed translator at the time of her translation of Woolf, well appreciated by popular Italian scholars such as

Praz (Celenza 1934). Alessandra Scalero, translator from German, English and French, collaborated in the creation of *Medusa*, a Mondadori collection dedicated to the great foreign writers; an interesting choice at the time of Mussolini's propaganda for the restoration of the Roman Empire and against any foreign influence on the life and culture of the Italian people. For Mondadori Scalero translated, via relay translation, the Danish Karen Bixten and the Finnish Sally Salminen, but also popular English and American women writers as Willa Cather, Carroll Gladys Hasty, Daphne Du Maurier, Vita Sackville West and the novel of Richard Aldington *Women must work*. In 1933, when Virginia Woolf was a well-known writer, with five published novels, only two extracts from *Mrs Dalloway* had been translated and published in Italian magazines. Fascist cultural politics and censorship, which put the *Baretti* out of business, a magazine whose main task was "to put into closer contact our culture with the foreign literatures" (Bolchi 2007: 19), could have played an important role in the selection and publication of foreign works, but the role of the translator was no less important. It was Alessandra Scalero who commented negatively on the first two Woolf novels *The voyage out* and *Night and day*, given to her for evaluation and which remained untranslated; in contrast, she translates *Orlando* and *Flush, a biography*, a success in terms of profits both in England and Italy, but not as enthusiastically welcomed by the English critic as by the Italian.

Andre Lefevere had pointed out the importance of specific elements in the literary system as the "specialists", the "patronage" and the "poetics" (Lefevere 1992/1998) in the circulation and reception of a text and Venuti stressed the importance of the context, not only in the selection of the texts to be translated, but also in the reception and insertion of the books into the literary canon, as in the case of Guareschi's books in America (Venuti 1999). In a recent article I pointed out the importance of non-literary elements in the creation of a key cultural text in a new culture (Calvani 2017a). Gender issues, relevance of the translator in the target context as well as the political and cultural context exerted a great influence over the reception of Shakespeare and Sterne in Italy, conditioning their knowledge and circulation in the country. Now, considering the case of Virginia Woolf, if it is true that the literary value of her writing was swiftly recognized in England as well as abroad, it is also true that on this basis we would have expected to find *Mrs Dalloway* as her first translation, or *To the Lighthouse*, which, on the contrary, was the last book to be translated soon after *Flush* and apparently with very little success in comparison. If the literary value of Woolf's writing answers the question why she went to Italy, this very element seems to contradict it if we ask how she got there, which books reached Italy and how they were received by the Italian critics. Is it possible that non-literary elements, like the ones pointed out by Lefevere and Venuti, exerted their influence to the point of filtering the presence of a writer deemed apparently too disruptive for the target literary system to be completely positively received and appreciated? The analysis of the editorial history of Virginia Woolf's Italian translations made possible, thanks also to the discovery of new and unpublished documents, mainly letters, could offer a possible answer to this question. Furthermore, the analysis of the translations will point out the importance of the literary "specialists" (Lefevere 1992/1998) whose close

connection and dependence on the economic power exerted by the publishing houses, which in turn cannot ignore the presence of fascist censorship, is evidenced by the selection of texts to be translated and sometimes also by the very choices made by the translators in their translations.

The editorial history of the texts, the analysis of the translation choices and of the documents (relevant reviews and unpublished letters kept at Mazzè library's archive¹ seem to point out the influence of elements other than the literary value in the selection of the books to be translated, particularly the commercial success of those books in England and abroad, answering the initial question of how and why Virginia Woolf went to fascist Italy. The contrasting opinions of the English and Italian critics over the texts (Bolchi 2007) and the preference accorded to the Italian ones, stress the importance of the specialists in the selection of the books to be translated, but it also points out the recovered importance of nationalism in the fascist era. Finally, in Scalero's case, the absence of any in-depth introduction, preface, translator's note or comment about the text and author seems to indicate the translator's strategy: on the one hand, to recreate the illusion of the original speaking to its new public obscuring the "filtering" presence of the translator; on the other, to disguise the presence of unwelcome topics under the apparent flow and simplification of the text in order to spare the book from the attention of fascist censorship. In Celenza's case, the illusion of the original speaking is almost complete, as the translator did not write a preface or comment and did not insert any note to the text. On the contrary, it is a male scholar, Emilio Cecchi, who took on the responsibility of writing a clearly scholar-intended introduction. Curiously enough, he does not talk about *To the Lighthouse*; "that must speak on its own" (1934: IX), but he focuses his attention on other works, particularly *Orlando* and *Flush*, published by Mondadori a short time earlier. Such a peculiar introduction tries to take advantage of the popularity of the translated Woolf novels on the one hand, and on the other appears to discredit them in favour of the new publication. It is again an economic strategy that seems to emerge here and, in its name, the literary value of the work remains in the background, to be used only as a weapon in the rivalry between publishing houses.

2 *Orlando*: a short premise

As discussed above, the answer to the questions how and why Virginia Woolf entered the Italian literary system of the thirties can be found in the editorial history of her translations, and in delineating it the first thing to be considered is its fascist context, the main striking element that made me question her presence in Mussolini's Italy. In fact, Woolf's first translation was published in a new Mondadori collection, *Medusa*, specifically dedicated to foreign authors, in the very first year of its activity in 1933. It is surprising, if we think that in the thirties fascism was stronger than ever in Italy and the sole purpose of

¹ All the Scalero's letters I quoted are unpublished letters kept in the Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library's Archive.

the censorship office was to prevent the publication of books considered contrary to fascist principles. Now the publication of foreign books, especially English and American, was certainly not in accordance with the autarchic policy of the country. Furthermore, the selection of many popular women writers offered to the Italian readership a female model that was completely the opposite of the traditional fascist model offered by the propaganda. In the thirties the fascist policy towards women experimented with severe restriction on the already few liberties allowed to them, with men's associations taking control over women fascist associations, and further restrictions on education and work possibilities. We should maybe thank the inefficiency of the censorship office or simply the cleverness of the publishers and their translators (Cembali 2006; Rundle/Sturge 2010) that we were able to read the most important books written at the time. Certainly, it was dangerous not to conform to the fascist rules, as proved by the many journals closed by fascism. It was necessary to carefully choose words and try to take advantage of every single opportunity, as could be seen in the publisher's note in the opening page of the *Medusa Almanacco* of 1934. The publisher, clearly fearing undesired attention from the government, in pointing out the necessity for each culture of the foreign contact to be "vital", makes explicit and direct reference to the leader of fascism. In particular, he says that the publisher wants to refer to the very Duce's guidelines on the cultural relationship between different countries and "against what we could call *the customs barriers* of the spirit"² (Mondadori 1934: 10). And he goes on to quote a sentence extracted from Mussolini's discourse at the President of the Italian authors society and reported by the latter to the German Propaganda minister, Goebbels, visiting that society: "trusting the Italian genius; avoiding exchanges limitations in the production of intellectual creations" (Mondadori 1934: 10). The publisher's attempt to clear his work from any possible charge is quite evident, and it was successful. Amid such a tense atmosphere Woolf's first translation took place and with long delays, if we consider the popularity of the writer in England and America but also in France, where *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* had already been translated, in 1929, followed by *Orlando* in 1931 and a monograph on the author in 1932. It is an Italian critic, Serafini, who clearly states in the pages of the *Saggiatore* that "first of all it is the fact of being a woman which damages the writer" (Bolchi 2007: 3611). After all, the biases against women writers had to be quite widespread as was already evident in the first Italian article on her, where Linati says that Virginia Woolf's work "reconciles me with the women who write" (Bolchi 2007: 2411) and some years later describes her as the writer "with all the freaks, the vapours, the levities, the resentments and the dear worries of her sex" (2007: 2949). Even Morra, a literary critic who had expressed high appreciation for Virginia Woolf's novels asks, about *A room of one's own*, "how is it possible that a true writer as Virginia Woolf, had put together, I will not say preposterous subjects, but a book which tastes of dull controversy" (Bolchi 2007: 3339).

² If not stated otherwise, all English translations from Italian are my translations.

In this scenario, Alessandra Scalero, an educated woman surely subject to all the biases which did not spare even the most popular women of the time, who wrote articles for women journals under pseudonyms and planned a series of books for women, not “mushy novels [...] often obsessive and useless”, but “books truly modern, that deal with women problems, their education, their evolution”³, could not escape the appeal of Woolf’s writing.

3 Orlando’s translation: “the economics of a literary profession”⁴

As discussed, Virginia Woolf, whose first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915, was a very popular writer with five published novels when the first Italian translation appeared in Italy in the thirties. Extracts from *Mrs Dalloway* had been published in translation by two literary journals, *La Fiera Letteraria* and *'900* (Bolchi 2007: 5037–5039, 5120–5121), in 1927 and 1929 respectively and it is possible to find short translated passages from *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in two articles published in 1928 and 1931 in *Il Baretto* and *La Cultura* (Bolchi 2007: 2472–2473, 2978–2979), but Italian readers had to wait till 1933 to read one of Woolf’s books in translation. The text selected to make Virginia Woolf’s official entrance in Italy was *Orlando*, published by Hogarth Press in 1928, and the Italian translator was Alessandra Scalero. An interesting choice if we consider that Italian literary critics had expressed their preferences for *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in the pages of the literary journals of the time (Bolchi 2007: 2398–2399) and the very translator, Alessandra Scalero, in 1932 describes *Mrs Dalloway* as Woolf’s best book (Bolchi 2007: 3596–3597). On the contrary, critics had differing opinions on *Orlando*. Morra defines the book “un buffo libro” [a funny book] (2007: 2928), while Sibilla Aleramo is tempted to define it a “masterpiece” (Bolchi 2007: 344). For certain, in 1933 Mondadori could not publish *To the Lighthouse* as Virginia Woolf had already sold the translation copyright to Treves in 1929, signing a contract which committed the Italian publisher to publish the book by 31 December 1931 (Bolchi 2007: 742), a contract that has never been upheld. As far as the preference accorded to *Orlando* is concerned, it could be only explained by the great success in terms of sold copies that the book had in England. After all, *Mrs Dalloway* had to be published soon after *Flush*, as could be argued from Mondadori’s correspondence with the translator.⁵ The publisher sent a list of books to be translated with the indication of the delivery dates for each book. In a letter dated 28 November 1933 *Mrs Dalloway* was already inserted, with the delivery date of 31 July 1934 and in a letter of 4 September 1934, the payment for the translation was fixed at 2000 lire. However, something must have caused a change to the schedule as the title appears again in the list of December 1934, with a revised delivery date of 31 December 1935, in the letter of 1937 and also in another letter of the following year in which Scalero had been told by the publisher to give precedence to Salminen’s *Katrina*,

³ Letter sent to Campitelli, 29 November 1930, Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive.

⁴ Extract from Leonard Woolf’s *Downhill All the Way* in Bolchi 2007.

⁵ Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive.

and postpone *Mrs Dalloway*. Reference to the latter book is in the Mondadori letter of 2 February 1940, in which the publisher says that Scalero could start working on the novel whose publication “has always been postponed for one reason or another” (Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive). This continuous procrastination had to be confusing for the translator, who asked the publisher for confirmation. However, *Mrs Dalloway* was not published until 1946, two years after the translator’s death.

Orlando was not treated in this way by the Italian publisher; at least there is no such evidence in Scalero’s surviving documents.⁶ Certainly it was to the translator’s credit if the book had been selected and translated, as she was also literary advisor to Mondadori. In fact, in 1931 in an article published in *Leonardo* she expresses her perplexities about *the Waves*, an original work for certain, but “which we do not feel to fully endorse” (Bolchi 2007: 3533) and in 1934 expressed a negative evaluation for Woolf’s first two books, which had “undeniable qualities”, but “the romance element is too poor to make it an element of success”(Bolchi 2007: 398) concluding that “it would be doing her [Virginia Woolf] a disservice to translate these first promises” (Bolchi 2007: 404). As a matter of fact, the comments point out the great interest of the Italian publisher in Virginia Woolf’s works, an interest surely increased by the great success of the first translation, 4,000 copies sold, as also proved by the translation of two extracts from *Jacob’s room* and *the Years*,⁷ the latter certainly published, and the translation of an essay, published in the *Medusa Almanacco* in 1934.

4 *Orlando*: the preface

As literary advisor and translator, Scalero knew Virginia Woolf’s books and read what had already been published about her in Italy and possibly in France. In fact, she had already published a paper on her in 1931, but she does not talk diffusely about the author in her translator’s note which precedes the translation. It is important to stress because, as Berman said (Berman 1995), in the absence of a translator’s preface, it is thanks to the paratext that it is possible to infer the translator’s strategy and his/her goals in translation, and consequently evaluate the translation in terms of achievement or otherwise of the goals. In this case, the translator presents the author and her book in just a four-page preface, in which, at the beginning at least, it is possible to hear the echo of Aleramo’s and Morra’s papers on the subject. She defines *Orlando* as a “book of culture” and “essentially English” and she points out that the book is a complicated one, which covers English history from the Elizabethan period until our times, the thirties. For this reason, she says she felt the need to help the reader with a preface. Actually, she only mentions the English authors named in the book, to move the “interpretation” on, but actually only slightly touching upon the subject. Asking herself which interpretation she would have chosen for the main topic of the book, *Orlando*’s metamorphosis, she starts

⁶ Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive.

⁷ Letters 18 May 1937, 22 May 1937, 7 June 1937 and extract drafts.

to ask questions. Is it an embodiment of poetry? Or, to quote the French preface of Mauron, “does it represent the persistency of a face and a mind through the generations, or the English gentry, or the English poetry, or the modern sexual uncertainty or just a walk of Ms Virginia Woolf through the ages?” (Scalero 1933: 10). Or, and this seems to be her own interpretation, “Orlando is also a typical portrait of the woman artist, who keeps in herself, in seed, all the characteristics of man and woman, develops and transforms them, until becoming, with a long and slow work, essentially, a woman who had assimilated in her own way male instincts?” (1933: 10). Unfortunately, she does not go any further, saying that this is a “dangerous thesis, a harsh topic, which would bring me too far from the modest aim I determined” (1933: 11). Finally, she asks “if Orlando is really the portrait of Miss Victoria Sackville West, to whom the book is dedicated?” (1933: 11), Woolf’s friend and writer. She just quotes *The Edwardians* among Sackville West’s books while certainly Scalero could have spent a few more words on the subject as she was going to publish her translation of *All Passion Spent* in 1934. The translator goes on to say that it is impossible not to see in *Orlando* a bold psychological study of the female nature, “and it touches vital matters, essential for the modern woman, it brushes against unsolved problems ...” (1933: 11). But she stops, saying that she was going deeper into “that labyrinth that I wanted to avoid”. So, she lets the reader be free to interpret the book as he believes best, concluding that this work of the heir of the best writers of her “race”, is one of the most significant of modern literature, not only English (1933: 12).

What emerges from these pages is Scalero’s knowledge of the literary criticism of her time, but somehow “tainted” by a sort of reticence. The possible interpretations of the metamorphosis are there, but only hinted at, as if it was not in the translator’s possibilities to say more, while at the same time she did not refrain completely from making implicit suggestions to the Italian readership, whose curiosity could be enhanced by the few clues. It was a “dangerous topic” as she herself said and saying too much could mean drawing the attention of the censorship office which had the power to refuse the authorization to publish. As a matter of fact, even if I did not find any reference to the censorship for this translation in the archive documents, I found a clear reference to it in a letter to Aldington of the same years.⁸ In fact, Scalero, talking about Aldington’s book *Death of a Hero*, says that “we’d like to publish it, but hélas! Certainly you will not ignore that in our country something called censorship does exist and we are afraid that even cutting the most dangerous passages, the book is not too much orthodox”.⁹ With such worries in mind, it was difficult to talk openly about the book. Nonetheless Scalero tries

⁸ The letter has no date, but it could be assumed that it was written in 1933 or 1934 as there is a reference to the publication of Aldington’s *All Men are Enemies*, whose translation had to be completed by 31 December 1933 (letter of Mondadori, 28 November 1933) and published in 1934.

⁹ Letter to Mr. Aldington, no date. In the letter she goes on to say that she knew the manager of the Press Office, Galeazzo Ciano, “young man, with a very open mind” and the Mondadori’s director advised her to talk directly with him to sponsor the publication. Mr. Aldington had to write a letter “the most possibly diplomatic” so that she could give it to Ciano. The letter is of great interest as it reveals the worries and the expedients that publishers and translators had to use in order to publish what they wanted, as long as they were cautious.

to do so, even touching on the subject of Sackville West, whose relationship with Woolf drew negative attention in England, but not considered at all in Italy, with the exception of a passing reference in Morra's paper that gets rid of it as an advertising expedient (Bolchi 2007: 2833). Such brevity could also be ascribed to the need to keep the balance between negative and enthusiastic comments expressed by the Italian literary critics (Bolchi 2007), the ones who will possibly write reviews on her translation endorsing not only the literary but also the economic success of her translation and possibly even conditioning the future assignment of other works by the publishers, influenced in turn by the economical element as well as by the relevance of the translator in the target context. The very same brevity can be found in another element of the paratext, the notes added to the text, actually very few and short, just one or two lines, always present in order to give explanations about what she believed to be unknown by the Italian readers, further indication of the unwillingness to be noticed too much or to risk any detailed comment.

5 The translation's analysis

The same reticence and need of balance that emerges from the pages of the preface between dangerous and safe topics can be found in the translation itself. First of all, the manual comparison between the English¹⁰ and the Italian texts reveals that Scalero used the English edition as the original; the American edition contains a few differences to the English one, which are not present in the Italian text.

The pictures present in the Italian text are the same as those found in the original, and the translation is quite literal, without (deletions/omissions) or additions of relevant passages, as it is possible to find in other translations of the fascist period (Calvani 2004). However, some differences must be noticed, and they could be divided into:

- (1) Unintentional changes.
- (2) Intentional changes.

In the first category we could insert the absence of very short sentences, as in the following examples:

- (a) The sentence "But if his senses were simple they were at the same time extremely strong" (Woolf 1998: 13) has not been translated in the corresponding Italian translation (Scalero 1933: 39).
- (b) The sentence "the mere look of the water was enough to turn one giddy" (1998: 23) has not been translated in the corresponding Italian translation (Scalero 1933: 61).

¹⁰ For the English text I used a reprinted edition of the first English original published by the Oxford's World Classics, 1998, Kindle edition.

- (c) Some longer missing passages can be found on page 243 of the Italian, page 104 of the English, and on page 247 of the Italian, 106 of English, but due to their nature it does not seem possible to ascribe their absence to censorship, but more likely to a small oversight of the translator.
- (d) The absence of four lines of the English, in which the names “Addison, Dryden and Pope” were “repeated as if the words were an incantation” could have been considered as stressing too much the importance of the English authors, but the absence also of the following sentence, “for one moment she saw the high mountains of Broussa, the next she had set her foot upon her native shore” (1998: 65) does not seem to confirm this hypothesis.

On the contrary, referring to the second category, intentional changes, the following examples could be ascribed:

- (a) Intentional changes due to religious matters:
 - The absence of two words in a sentence entirely translated, “Providence” (1998: 107), translated as “natura” [nature] (1933: 25) and “religion” (1933: 62) could be the translator’s choice, if not the work of a censor, as it was a delicate topic to deal with, especially after the Lateran pacts.
 - On the contrary, when in English we have “no time, no devotion, can be too great, therefore, which makes the vehicle of our message less distorting” (1998: 67), in Italian the translator adds “Dio” [God], so that it becomes “migliorare imezzi che Dio ci ha dato” [improving the instruments that God gave us] (1933: 162).
- (b) Intentional changes due to the formal moral code of the time:
 - Words like “hussy”, “strumpet” (1998: 9, 30, 31) have been softened somehow and translated as “pettegola”, “sgualdrina” [gossip, tramp] (1933: 29, 78) and “meretrice” [harlot] (1933: 78). Curiously, even the word “kissing” (1998: 101), translated as “abbracciare” [hugging] (1933: 238), could be attributed to a form of self-censorship due to the strict morals of the time, as the same word has been identically translated in *Flush*, as we will see.
- (c) Intentional change due to the translator’s concerns about the education of women:
 - The translation of “teaching” (1998: 62), referred to women in the original, as “il diritto di essere colte” [the right of being learned] (1933: 149) could be also inserted in the intentional changes category as the Italian translation is stronger when compared to the English original and seems to be the translator’s answer to the Gentile education reform and the fascist politics about women’s education which wanted to cut them off from that very right (De Grazia 1992). The subject should have been particularly dear to the translator if she decides not to literally translate the word but to intensify it in translation, particularly if we consider that this seems to be

the only “freedom” the translator took with the text, usually adapted to the Italian literary and political norms and somehow standardized.

- (d) Intentional changes due to the deletion of the foreign element to conform to Italian standards.
- The names of foods have been changed and substituted with Italian ones in the name of that very requirement to make the foreign text a more standard Italian text. So, we have “frittata” (234) for “omelette” (99), “tortelli” (1933: 91) for “pies” (1998: 36), “pappa d’orzo” (1933: 54) for “porridge” (1998: 20), “acquavite” (1933: 51) for “brandy” (1998: 18) and so on. This is a common practice that is possible to find also in the eighteenth century Italian translations, but in this case, it finds its justification also in the fascist war against foreign words (Ferro 2016).
 - Some words possibly unknown in Italy have been changed, too. So “pariah dogs” (1998: 46, 47) becomes “cane vagabondo” [vagabond dogs] and “randagi” [stray] (1933: 116, 115) and “wombat” (1998: 93) is “topo” [mouse] (1933: 220).
 - The spaniel, which in *Flush* remains untranslated, in *Orlando* is “cane spagnuolo” (1933: 34, 35; 1998: 11, 12).
 - The insertion of many Italian common sayings in translation, which make the Italian reader feel more comfortable with the text after the possible hitch created by unfamiliar words and contributing to the clean-up of the “foreign”, so hated by the regime. A case in point could be found on page 253 where the expression “ridiculously” (1998: 44) has been translated as “da far ridere i polli” (1933: 111) or “far la cicogna” (1933: 189) for “stand on one feet” (1998: 79) or “perticonna” for “May Pole”, “ganzo” for “lover” and “gonzi” for “gulls” (1933: 167, 77, 86; 1998: 69, 30, 33).
 - In line with the creation of a familiar language, we find that the names of the prostitutes met by *Orlando* have an article preceding them in Italian, (1933: 204; 1998: 85) as is the norm in northern Italian dialects.

Those changes are certainly due to the translator’s need to transform the foreign into the familiar in order to get the English text closer to the Italian reader, but they are also an example of the “standardization” work that the translator had to operate in order not to disturb the sensibility of fascist critics, censorship and possible readership with a text which keeps too much of its English peculiarities, allowing a sort of estrangement effect on the reader which distances him/her from the text and makes him/her think, as suggested by Venuti, through the use of the “remainder” in translation (Venuti 1999: 10). The fascist war against foreign words of all kinds started in the early twenties, with fascist announcements forbidding the use of foreign words on pain of being “persuaded” not to do it by the fascist Blackshirts (Ferro 2016) and in 1929 the Accademia Italiana created a commission in order to translate into Italian all the foreign words that had entered into the Italian language. The translations of “touring club Italiano” in “consociazione turistica”

or of the football team's name "Internazionale" (Inter) in "Ambrosiana" (Ferro 2016) are an example of the extensive work that fascists did in order to eliminate any hint of foreign words from the Italian language and to point out the strict control of fascism on every aspect of Italian life. The highlighting of the Italian values and of the Italian "race", as it was commonly said, is mirrored in the "purification" of the Italian language, transforming the language into another element of the wished-for autarky campaign, and this is perfectly evident in the translator's choices.

- (e) Intentional changes due to a form of compensation in translation:
- The insertion of archaic or unfamiliar words in Italian in order to reproduce the use of archaic words in the English original, even if not in the corresponding English passages. It is an intentional change that exemplifies the translator's attempt to reproduce the peculiar original language of the text. It is the case of "timidità" (1933: 196) for "timidity" (Woolf 1998: 82), "purity" (Scalero 1933: 129) for "purity" (1998: 51), "tonitruar" (1933: 130) for "pealed" (1998: 53) and so on. The translator seems to compensate in a passage what she could not render somewhere else.¹¹
- (f) Intentional changes due to the cultural subjugation to the fascist exaltation of manliness:
- The translation of "maids" (1998: 107) with "sguattere" [scullion] (1933: 249), of "man" with "maschio" [male] (1933: 144; 1998: 60), "male" with "virile" [manly] (1933: 176; 1998: 73) and "woman" with "femmina" [female] (1933: 65, 70; 1998: 25, 28).

In line with the fascist exaltation of manliness and the subsequent debasement of the role of women, with no active part in the political and social life of the country, the Italian language mirrors the same violence in the word choices and sounds quite aggressive. The stress on the manliness and its violence has been emphasized by the equivalent stress on the violent language used in describing women and women's activities. The use of the word "female" seems to deprive women of the dignity of the human being, confining them mainly to their reproductive role. As stressed by Bock: "Biology itself was a cultural construct used to legitimate inequalities between men and women which did not derive from biological differences" (Passmore 2003: 5).

¹¹ The great attention Scalero took in her translation is slightly visible in one of her letters to Viviana, her sister (The letter has no date, but it is archived among the ones written in 1932–1933.). She asks for help for some *Orlando's* passages even if the book is not nominated. Particularly she asked her for the translation of Othello's passage and the moth's "laughter" (1933: 250; 1998: 107), which has been translated writing the "laughter" as if it was telegraphed, so that the English "tee hee haw haw. Laughter Laughter!" becomes "tintinn – tinn – zirr – zirr – zirrr ... Che ri ... che ri ... che ridere." It was not uncommon for Alessandra Scalero to ask for help from her sister for the translation of poetry. It could be noticed also in the letter of August 1933 where she asked for her opinion on the translation of the title of Sackville West's novel *All passion spent*.

- (g) Intentional changes due to the cultural subjugation to the fascist exaltation of the Italian country:
- The insertion of the suspension points in the sentence “superiority of the British” (1998: 49), translated with a vague “superiorità della [...] britannica [...]” [superiority of ... British ...] (Scalero 1933: 121), probably to avoid provoking the indignation of the fascists who promoted the superiority of the “Roman race”.
 - The insertion of Latin words not present in the original (1933: 72, 184; 1998: 28, 77). The use of Latin words is a direct reference to the Roman Empire and to the glory of Rome whose restoration fascist propaganda boasted about (Falasca Zamponi 2003: 143–160) and makes the text conform to the emphatic style of the time.
 - The substitution of the “Italian fireplace” (1998: 35, 36) with “caminetto all’italiana” [Italian-style fireplace] (1933: 89, 91) in which Green disrespectfully roasted the cheese, the translation of “Italian” (1998: 115) with “Savoiaro” [Savoyard] (1933: 269) and the omission of the word “Italian” for the translation of the “Italian marbles” (1933: 82; 1998: 32).

All these changes seem to be connected to the fact that everything defined as Italian had to be evidenced in the fascist era. Particularly, “the Italian organ grinders in back streets” (Woolf 1998: 115) linked Italian people to misery and emigration. That is the possible reason for the change of “Italian” into “Savoyard”, while the “Italian marbles” in an English aristocratic residence could be considered simply as inappropriate also due to the possible connection with the “sack” of antiquities that foreign collectors had perpetrated during their travels in Italy.

- (h) Intentional changes due to the translator’s will of making explicit reference to the literary critic on Woolf’s writing:
- The translation of “time keeping” with “ritmo” [rhythm] (1933: 281) intentional as it seems to be a reference to the importance of the rhythm in Virginia Woolf’s writing as already noticed by the literary critics of the time (2007: 612).
- (i) Intentional change due to the personal translation concept of the translator:
- The translation of the word “translating” (1998: 56) with “interpretare” [interpreting] (1933: 138), which evidences how naturally, for the translator, translating implied an interpretation being “not merely a mechanical task”, as Scalero told Mr Aldington in the letter 13 July 1933.

Certainly, this “strange book”, which “irritates and seduces” as Emanuelli said to her in a letter¹² commenting on her translation, was a great success and the translator herself should have been satisfied with her work. It is evident in the letter to Praz, 13 July 1933, where, answering to a not very generous comment on her translation of Dos Passos’

¹² The letter has no date.

Manhattan Transfer, Scalero asks for the critic opinion on her *Orlando*, which was an effort, as she said and particularly if he noticed any improvement. After all, in the very same letter she claims the great interest she had in the books she translated, usually proposed to the publisher by herself, and she complains about the translator's work that sometimes would need to be "heroes" to do a good job and for no glory at all as the reader and the publisher, not knowing the original language, cannot really appreciate it.

6 *Flush: a biography, the autarky of the Italian literary critics*

In a letter from Mondadori to Scalero, 28 November 1933, we read that the *Flush* translation had to be sent to the publisher by 28 February 1934, soon after Aldington's translation of *All men are enemies*, submitted by 31 December 1933. In fact, in a letter of 29 January 1934 to her sister, Scalero apologizes for the short letter saying that: "Mondadori is pressing me for that blessed *Flush* and as *Orlando's* translation has been a success I'm working hard on this, too" (Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive). She revised her translation until the end of August, as could be seen in the publisher's letters about the draft corrections and she was still working on it in November, just before the publication. It is curious to find out that the publisher wanted to publish the *Flush* translation together with *Mrs Dalloway*. In the letter of 27 February 1934, the publisher says that the book,

"insofar as you could stretch it, will never manage to form a volume of Medusa on its own. We believe that it would be better to do a great shot and publish *Flush* followed by *Mrs Dalloway*, so that we can present the volume with the title *Flush-Mrs Dalloway*. As such it would be a volume of great interest."

Actually, in a telegram of 1 March, Mondadori communicates to the translator that they decided to publish *Flush* on its own, so she could start working on Carroll's translation. The letters point out the haste and confusion of the translator's work, forced to finish, start and change plans every week.

As she did for *Orlando*, Scalero also wrote the introduction to her translation. The first preface was refused by the publisher. In the letter dated 20 March 1934, the general co-director says that they read the preface but "it does not convince us. As a critical essay it is too rushed, [...]. It would be necessary that you kindly omit the parts relating to the critical interpretation of Woolf's work and indulge more on the setting and characters" (Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive). In fact, in a letter to her sister of the same period she sent her an article on Virginia Woolf and *Flush* that was to be used as preface and had to be changed "for opportunity reasons." Certainly, the published preface corresponds completely with the publisher's desires. It is a report of the biographical events regarding Elizabeth Barrett, spirit "almost virile" and Robert Browning, grown up in a family context completely opposite to that of his wife. There is no reference to any critical comment about the book, Italian or English, or about Woolf's work in general. Stress has been given to their Italian stay and to their interest in the Italian independence cause, so much so that a "rumour" was reported which attributed Elizabeth Browning's death to her concerns about the events of the Italian Risorgimento and Cavour's death.

Now, if this introduction is longer compared to the one written for *Orlando*, it does not really add anything to the knowledge of the book and author. Actually, both papers seem to obey the very same rule: stay vague and do not express any in-depth critical comment about the novel or Woolf's work in general. It is possible that the publisher did not consider the translator, a woman, scholarly enough to write a critical essay, which, it must be remembered, was usually written by male scholars, especially for great authors, as was the case for Shakespeare. It is also possible that due to the tense climate of the time the publisher preferred not to expose the new-born *Medusa* collection to too much attention. It is impossible to know which critical interpretations Scalero reported, but the fact that the publisher asked her to omit them, focusing on the biographical references, confirm again the unwillingness to "disturb" censorship and readership with any too in-depth analysis which could reveal overly disruptive and dangerous topics, and of course it points out the power of the publisher over the translator's choices, forced to keep a balance between literary needs and working necessities. Be that as it may, what emerges from the introduction is a sort of "embarrassment", the difficulty of dealing with a new modern author, a woman author, who refuses to be imprisoned in the ordinary categories of the Italian literary critics so that it is better to confine to the ordinary but safe biographical reports than to express any original but possibly dangerous comment.

Considering other elements of the paratext, pictures and notes follow the original. As in *Orlando*, there are only very few notes inserted by the translator which account for what the reader may not know, as the name of a card game or the reference to a Robert Browning poem. The note on page 35 is of some interest as Scalero explains that "they", her and the proof-reader maybe, had left unchanged the adjectives for the fur color of *Flush*, red, but actually, it should be a different color. It is of interest as it reveals the attention Scalero gave to the translation of the physical characteristics of the spaniel. In fact, in a letter to Barisoni, November 1934 (Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive), she asked for help with the translation of some terms which worried her and for which she did not want to be criticized. She says that Ojetti translated "spagnuolo" [Spanish] for "spaniel", as she also did it in *Orlando*, while Praz left it in the original language, and she goes on to express her doubts about the translation of the "curled ears", the "dark brown" color and the "feathers" of the paws that she translated as "frangia" [bangs]. She should have been reassured by her correspondent as we can find in translation the terms as indicated in the letter, apart from "retriever". She rightly translated it as "cane da riporto", but she said that she did not like it, and in fact we find the English term in the Italian translation.

7 *Flush*: the translation analysis

As far as the translation is concerned, the Italian *Flush* has been closely translated from the English original, but it is possible to find here and there some differences. As in *Orlando* the differences can be divided in to two main categories of intentional and unintentional changes.

To the first category it could be ascribed the absence in translation of some short sentences. So, for example:

- (a) The sentence “raising his head from the tiled floor, he listened attentively” (1933: 116) has not been translated in the corresponding Italian passage (1933: 165).
- (b) The sentence: “here Flush shook his ears in an agony of perplexity. He turned uneasily on the floor. Mr Browning was Miss Barrett, Miss Barrett was Mr Browning. Love is hatred and hatred is love” (1933: 67) has not been translated (1933: 103).

Due to the innocence of the omitted passages it does not seem probable to attribute their absence to any reason other than distraction, especially if we consider that often the last words preceding the passage omitted are the same or similar to the words in the end of it. So, if we consider the last example, the preceding translated sentence was just “Love is hatred and hatred is love” and it is clear that in this case the translator, in looking from the original to the writing of the translation, has started reading the subsequent line, confused by the identical words.

- (c) Some of the dates of the original have been changed. So for example, on page 108 of the Italian we find the date 1 September, but in the English original it is 12 September (1933: 71) and again on page 117 we find 1 September while in English it is 2 September (1933: 77), so that the following day is 2 September in Italian (1934: 121) and 3 September in English (1933: 80), 3 September in Italian (1934: 124) is 4 September in English (1933: 83), to become identical a few pages later, 5 September, in both texts (1933: 94; 1934: 137) and change again on pages 100 and 144 of the English.

If for some reason the translator decided to anticipate the dates of the Italian text by one day, the fact that one of the dates in the list, 5 September, remained unchanged seems to contradict this theory.

In comparison with the translation of *Orlando*, very few examples can be offered for the category of the intentional changes. In particular:

- (a) Intentional changes due to the formal moral code of the time:
 - The translation of “kissing each other” with a softer “abbracciava” [hugged] (1933: 113; 1934: 162) as was already the case in *Orlando*.
- (b) Intentional changes due to the deletion of the foreign element to conform to the Italian standards.
 - The presence of common sayings, as in *Orlando*, such as “diviso gioie e dolori” (1933: 61; 1934: 96), “per un pelo” (1933: 86; 1934: 128), “in carne e ossa” (1933: 93; 1934: 136) that reinforce the colloquial register of the text.
- (c) Intentional change due to the personal translation concept of the translator:

- The presence of a neologism “scandolezzato” (1934: 112) inserted by the translator to render the dog peculiarity of forming impressions of the world through the sense of smell.

This translation was a new success as it is possible to see from the publisher’s letter dated 25 March 1936 asking to check the translation for the reprint (Fondo Scalero, Mazzè Library Archive). Certainly, it is strange to see how *Flush*, a book that in England has always been considered a minor work of Virginia Woolf, was quickly translated into Italian, only a year after it was published in England. The Italian critics showed great interest for this book, which Sorani in 1933 defined as “one of the works that will stay among the most popular, easy and vivid between the ones of Woolf’s” (Bolchi 2007: 3746) and only Rebora in 1934 defines as a “little sacrilege” (2007: 4238). It is possible that the book was so well received by the Italian critics due to the fact that it is more easily set among the traditional biographies, even if it is a biography of a dog. The characters are well described, without that “vagueness” which made some critics talk about Woolf’s impressionism. Furthermore, the Italian setting of part of the story and the involvement of the protagonists in the Italian Risorgimento cause, as stressed in the preface, probably contributed to Italy’s positive reception. As evidenced also by the absence of great intentional alterations in its translation, there is no complication, no too “dangerous” topics in this book and this made it easy to talk about it without that sort of embarrassment caused by some of Woolf’s other texts. It should have been a relief to speak about a novel of a great author which did not present the peculiarities that could be considered too modern and unfamiliar to be appreciated. Finally, the contrasting opinions of the English and Italian critics on the texts, and the preference accorded to the Italian ones point out the recovered importance of nationalism in the fascist era, with less attention accorded to foreign literary critics. At a time when fascism was exporting its values in foreign countries, with fascist movements proliferating all over Europe, even in Britain and America and fascist texts translated into English (Calvani forthc.), Italy seems to become more and more culturally isolated, with the glorification of the national culture forcing critics to look timidly at foreign cultural literature, as the case of Woolf’s translations seem to testify. The embarrassment which forced Italian feminists, who looked for connections with foreign feminists in the early twentieth century, to create a “Latin Feminism” (Passmore 2003: 17) in order to make feminism survive fascism gender categories reflects the cultural autarky of the country, with literary critics who prefer to ignore the critical comments expressed by foreign colleagues, thanks also to the regime’s hostility to everything that came from abroad, language included, and launch themselves into an apparently original but actually conforming and safer literary opinion.

8 *To the Lighthouse* – the standardization of an original work

The book, published in 1927, was translated into Italian and published by Treves in 1934. As discussed, the translation copyright had already been sold to Treves in 1929, with the Italian publisher committed to publishing the book by 31 December 1931. It is evidence

of the interest that the book had soon aroused, just like *Mrs Dalloway*. Strangely enough just like *Mrs Dalloway* the book was published only years later.

The translator was not Alessandra Scalero, as we may have expected, being the official Woolf translator, but Giulia Celenza, who had also translated Stevenson, Swinburne and Shakespeare, with her *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* published in 1934, after her death. Actually, the translator did not see the publication of her *Gita al Faro*. Celenza died in 1933, soon before the publication of the book, as Emilio Cecchi, popular literary critic and writer of the introduction, tells us.

It is not possible to know if the introduction was written by Cecchi due to some physical impediments of the translator, but certainly it is a preface with an evident critical mark. There is no trace of that sort of reticence that we found in the introductions in *Orlando* and *Flush*; here the writer says clearly from the beginning that “*To the Lighthouse* is, of Virginia Woolf, nowadays, her greatest work” (Woolf 1934: V). There is no hesitation. Actually, the book was positively received by the literary critic Morra in 1928 and the same critic, in 1931, put it, together with *Mrs Dalloway* and *Jacob’s Room* among the best Woolf works. But looking at the articles published in the thirties (Bolchi 2007: 2398), the prize of the best book is usually given to *Mrs Dalloway*, with some remarkable disagreements about the others. Cecchi slightly refers to *The common reader* to stress Woolf’s “critic excellence” (VI) and hints at the influence of Proust and Joyce, as others did before him, to finally talk briefly about the other novels. He says that the “tone” of *Mrs Dalloway* is disturbed by “the will of making correspond in the narration some symbolic facts”, in *the Waves* “the literary ability is in excess”, *Orlando* is one of the boldest “fancy” of the modern literature just like *Flush* (curiously written as “Flesh”), but more ironic. Cecchi particularly lingers on these two books, stressing that “they are made to let marvel continental critics and readers, not too much acquainted with the spirits and, let us say, the English literary habits” (1934: VII). And he goes on to say that “to a more vast research of sources, their garishness could only be lowered”.

He then moves on to quote the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son, just published in the *Medusa Almanacco* in 1934 in the Scalero’s translation. He uses this essay to briefly talk about the English literature of the eighteenth century, which explains “the lightness of the touch, the pleasurable irony of the tone and the sympathy at the same time full of discretion with which Woolf deals with the same subject that towers over in the sinister theologies of Joyce” (1934: IX).

He concludes by saying that “they” wanted “the book to speak of its own to the reader” and that “they only tried to put the focus on the attention point”, that is why he explained the reasons of “minor approval” for works as *Orlando* and “Flesh”.

The stress on *Orlando* and *Flush* is evident, so much so that Cecchi goes on to talk about *Orlando*’s passage of the great cold, “an arsenal of miraculous bric-à-brac”. Such insistence on the subject seems to actually point out the great success of *Medusa*’s publications. Cecchi knows that this new Woolf translation will be probably read in the wake of the success of *Orlando* and *Flush*, so by naming them, he uses something

already known by the public to lower their literary value while highlighting the importance of this new translation.

At the end of his preface he refers to Giulia Celenza and her translation, saying that it is evident that “since some years the quality of our translations is improved” and Celenza was part of it. He talks about her other works to finally say that in the translation of *To the Lighthouse* she probably had to face the most difficult task.

due to the reflex and composite nature of Woolf’s writing, [...]. Some inversions a little gasping come from that, some light stressing in the ironic tones, or the nuance of some period not completely fused and united. Unavoidable defects, as every translation, even the most accomplished, is in the end a compromise. (Cecchi 1934: XI)

Cecchi’s words seem to hint at a veiled dissatisfaction for Celenza’s work, which actually does not seem to have shared the same success of *Orlando* and *Flush* as testified by the very few left copies of the volume in libraries or on sale.

9 *To the Lighthouse*: the translation analysis

Considering the translation, firstly, the English text used by Giulia Celenza to accomplish her work was the Uniform edition. The manual comparison between the British edition (1927), American edition (1927), Uniform edition (1930) and Albatross edition (1932), all presenting little differences, proves this. But source text apart, it is undeniable that the Italian translation sounds a little awkward here and there.

First of all, the title, *Gita al faro*; it is curious that Morra, in the very first article of 1928, stressing the importance of the titles in Woolf’s novels, had noticed that such a translation would be inappropriate for the English title, as “nobody reading the title imagine that it is the story of a pic-nick” (Bolchi 2007: 2524). It would be better translated as *Al faro*, as it has been done by Nadia Fusini in her translation.

It is a close translation, with no relevant cuts apart, again, for the absence of short sentences, probably due to distraction, as in the case of Scalero.

- (a) It is the case on page 31 of the Italian, where the sentence: “and to those words what meaning attached after all?” (1930: 42), has not been translated or on page 68, where the sentence “he is absorbed in himself” (1939: 76) is not present.
- (b) To the unintentional changes could be also attributed the confusion in the translation of the names, not always translated in Italian. So, we find “Prue” (1934: 151), but also “Prudenza” (1934: 161), Jasper (1934: 151), but also Giacomo (1934: 158), or Nancy (1934: 76) usually “Nannina” (1934: 75).

Different is the case of the translation of some words, evidently changed according to the translator’s choice. Of these intentional changes many examples can be offered, particularly:

- (a) Intentional changes due to the deletion of the foreign element to conform to the Italian standards.
- The presence of the tuscan “garbare” for “piacere” [to like] (1930: 90; 1934: 76) and the translation of “farinata” for “porridge” (1930: 75; 1934: 61), Celenza was in fact from Florence.
- (b) Intentional changes due to the translator’s will of making explicit reference to the literary criticism of Woolf’s writing.
- The introduction of a Carducci echo in the translation of “with stars in her eyes” (1930: 27), as “occhi stellanti” (1934: 17) and of Lucini, “veils in her hairs”, “veli alle chiome”, in the same pages, maybe an attempt of reflecting “the intense lyricism” that Rosati noticed in *To the Lighthouse* in 1933 (2007: 3955).

The literary reference to a popular Italian poet on the one hand makes the text more Italian, on the other it marks the text as a literary one, making the reader associate it with the literary canon.

- (c) Intentional changes due to religious matters:
- The expression “as God himself”, has been translated with a softer “un Dio” [a God] (1930: 119; 1934: 104), pointing out again the translator’s care in dealing with religious matters.
- (d) Intentional changes due to the cultural subjugation to the fascist exaltation of manliness conforming what is “female” to the stereotyped concepts and roles proposed by fascism:
- As in *Orlando* we find the translation of “man” (130) with “maschio” [male] (115) and in line with the times, the translation of “leader” as “duce” (1930: 147; 1934: 130).
 - With reference to the daughters of Mrs Ramsay in the original we have: “a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, [...] though to them all there was something in this of the essence of beauty, which called out the manliness in their girlish hearts” (1930: 16). In Italian the translator deletes the word “manliness”, substituting it with “ambizioni” [ambitions], while “girlish” becomes “fanciullesco” [childish] (1934: 7).
 - The “women” of the painter Pauncefort (1930: 26) becomes “donnine” [little women] (1934: 16).
 - “the children” said that Mr Tamsley was “such a miserable specimen” (1930: 17), while it is “le ragazze” [the girls] (1934: 7) that say it in the Italian.
 - In another passage, when it could be supposed that Mrs Ramsay had a “latent desire to doff off her royalty of form” and “she wanted only to be like other people, insignificant” (1930: 51), in Italian we read that “she wanted only to feel insignificant as many other women” (1934: 39).

- The English sentence “All her impressions as a woman” (1930: 86) has been translated as “impressioni donnesche” [womanish impressions] (1934: 72).
- The translation of “her youngest” (1930: 45) referred to James as “il suo piccolino” [her little boy] (1934: 34), “Cam” as “monelluccia” [little rascal] (1930: 87; 1934: 73) and “them”, “i due piccini” [the two little children] (1930: 94; 1934: 80). It must also be noticed the translation of “galanteria” [gallantry] for “sex” (1930: 262; 1934: 234).
- The disambiguation of the English pronouns obeys the same standardization of language and most of all roles. So, it is quite common to find “he”, “him”, referred to Mr Ramsay, translated as “il filosofo” [the philosopher] (1930: 150, 161; 1934: 133, 144), “marito” [husband] (1934: 42), “professore” [professor] (1930: 236; 1934: 210) and even “l’eroe” [the hero] (1930: 61; 1934: 48), or “she”, “her” as “la moglie” [the wife] (1930: 55, 148; 1934: 42, 131) “la cara donna” [the dear woman] (1930: 61; 1934: 48) and Mrs Ramsay as “l’amica” [she-friend] (1930: 82, 83; 1934: 68, 69). The apparently innocent changes force the characters to enlist in categories that delineate what was indefinite in the original.

It is clear from the examples that the translator translates as feminine what was neutral in English, conforming the text to a sort of gender standardization that actually seems to reproduce gender stereotypes. The importance of the translator agency in conforming to gender stereotypes must not be underestimated since, as Simon says:

Identity is understood as a positioning in discourse and in history. [...] Emphasis is placed on the active nature of representational practices, which are seen to construct positions for subjects and to produce identities [...]. Cultural practices are central to the production of subjects, rather than simply reflecting them. (Simon 1996: 141)

The translator’s choice of words with regard to women reflects the “Latin sexism” which De Grazia speaks about in her book on fascism and women. As gender historians pointed out:

Ideas about gender [...] typically take the form of a fixed binary opposition. [...] Femininity might then be expressed as the negative term of a binary opposition, and women might be seen as imprisoned within linguistic structures. Female agency (and indeed male agency) becomes a linguistically created illusion. (Passmore 2003: 4)

Actually, if some scholars question the practical constraints of patriarchal discourse (Passmore 2003), the stereotyped gender categories in which the translator imprisons the text seem to get evidence of the women agency in the fascist antifeminist campaign. Furthermore, the translator reproduces the contradictions of fascist politics about women. The translator, who certainly had access to superior education, does not hesitate to conform her language to the gender roles proposed by fascism, transforming herself, for opportunism, commitment to fascist policy or to the publisher’s exigencies, into an instrument of the power.

The translation was not widespread as could be inferred by one of the letters of Mondadori. The publisher, writing about the copyright of this work to Leonard Woolf in 1945, says he did not know that it had ever been translated (2007: 757). Certainly, the publication had to be somewhat rushed as the difference in the translation of the names seems to point out, difference that a second check could have easily eliminated. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that some characteristics of the text make it conform to the style of the time, so that it “grew old” more quickly than the others. The original Woolf text is less recognizable in this translation and that is why, notwithstanding the appreciation for this first attempt accomplished in such a difficult situation, a new translation was needed.

10 Conclusion

Fascist Italy of the thirties might seem like the last country an English modern female writer such as Virginia Woolf would go to, especially when we consider the fascist propaganda about nationalism. Certainly, it is undeniable that there were many books and journals created just to promote the importance of the nation and of the Italian “race”, and the propaganda did not stop at the Italian borders, as it is possible to see from the numbers of translations of fascist books and original fascist texts written in foreign languages during the twenties and thirties. It was in journals of nationalist propaganda as *Il Selvaggio* that in 1927 Maccari wrote: “We reject and intend to fight in all possible ways every remaining new attempt of national bastardizing caused by the spreading between us of theories, forms and attitudes, of foreign origin and especially northern and American” (Bolchi 2007: 316). It is still more difficult to understand it when we think about the great fascist propaganda effort to promote marriage and maternity, the main and sometimes the only roles proposed by fascism to women. The creation of fascist associations as the *Giovani Italiane*, to which girls from 13 to 18 years old were enlisted, had the explicit purpose of “teaching to the students to become good housewives and good mothers” (Pomba 1928: 606). It was a woman, Margherita Armani, who in the book *Fascist Civilization* wrote a chapter entitled *Fascism and the Woman*. In this essay she tries to explain to Italian women that had fought to get civil rights and had supported fascism in the illusion to finally get them, that it was right to get back to traditional patriarchal values and that “it was not a matter of pushing the woman back again, but of nullifying and preventing the artificiality of woman life” (Pomba 1928: 617).

If these were the official values of the time, next to them coexisted different ideas that tried to survive between the lines of the contradictions left unresolved by fascism. For this reason, Margherita Armani, after having spent many pages in convincing women to go back home, finally considers an education programme to favour “the womanly exceptions, the truly called to art and science” (Pomba 1928: 631). It was thanks to these “exceptions” that women like Alessandra Scalero and Giulia Celenza could write and publish. And thanks to that very contradiction, collections of foreign books as *Medusa* could survive taking advantage of decontextualized extracts of speeches as the one

pronounced for the Goebbels visit, “avoiding exchanges limitations in the production of intellectual creations” (Mondadori 1934: 10).

Maybe there is some disappointment when we consider that only three of Virginia Woolf’s books have been translated and that the others had to wait until the end of the war to be published. Furthermore, looking at the selection it is impossible not to quote the words of Leonard Woolf who said:

The statistics of Virginia’s earnings as a writer of books [...] throw a curious light on the economics of a literary profession and on the economic effect of popular taste on a serious writer. *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *The Years* were immeasurably more successful than any of Virginia’s other novels. *The Years*, much the most successful of them all, was, in my opinion, the worst book she ever wrote – at any rate, it cannot compare, as a work of art, or a work of genius, with *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse*, or *Between the Acts*. [...] Nearly all artists, from Beethoven downward, who suddenly, have had something highly original to say, have been through periods in which the ordinary person has found him unintelligible or “inaccessible” but eventually, in some cases suddenly, some gradually, he becomes intelligible and is everywhere accepted as a good or a great artist. In Virginia’s case, she had to write a bad book and two not very serious books before her best serious novels were widely understood and appreciated.” (Bolchi 2007: 1460–1483).

As a matter of fact, the words of Leonard Woolf could easily reflect the situation of Virginia Woolf’s first Italian translations. The economic success of *Orlando*’s and *Flush*’s translations¹³ in contrast with the scarce circulation of *To the Lighthouse*’s seems to prove it. The translators’ skills could have further affected the result, but there are still more elements that must be taken into account. First of all, the question of how the texts were selected and why. It certainly cannot just be a coincidence if the most original works of Woolf have not been translated. The Italian literary system could not allow the entrance of something potentially disruptive of its standard literary norms and canons, but the influence of the economic element in such a choice cannot be denied, even in times of censorship, and the editorial history of the translations of *Orlando*, *Flush* and *To the Lighthouse* seems to confirm it. Furthermore, the power exerted over the translators by the patronage and the specialists could be evidenced by the translation analyses first of all in the paratext, with few or even any at all reference to in-depth analysis of the texts whatsoever and finally in the very translations choices in terms of standardization of unusual elements or unwelcome topics. Apparently, in the struggle between literary value and economic success it is the latter that has been the key element in the admission of Woolf into the Italian public. Unfortunately, contrary to what Leonard Woolf said, in Italy the success of her “minor” books did not open the way to the “more serious ones”, the difficult context of the time slowing down their reach and resisting access until the end of the war.

¹³ Extracts of *The Years* had been published in translation by Alessandra Scalero on journals.

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