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Popular Magazines in Fascist Italy, 1934 – 1943

A dissertation submitted by

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The dissertation examines the field of popular magazines in 1930s Italy, by first examining the broad field of magazine production under Fascism and then undertaking three case studies of individual magazines – *L'Avventuroso* (1934 – 1943), *Omnibus* (1937 – 1939), and *Grazia* (1938 –) – in order to build an in-depth analysis of the production, format and reception of the popular press in this period.

In the interwar years, and in particular from 1934 onwards, innovative printing techniques and production methods transformed the periodical press worldwide. The emergence of new forms of illustrated magazines expanded the readership and started a process of standardisation and mass production of periodicals. The dissemination in Italy of the *rotocalco*, a new product aimed at the masses that was developed in the 1930s, offers a particularly interesting starting point for analysing the development of a modern Italian mass press and culture within the peculiar dynamics of a controlling Fascist regime and the mixed national and international forces that shaped it. Modern Italian magazines developed in dialogue with foreign industries, imitating models from abroad and adapting them to the Italian culture. The development of popular press in the 1930s represented a challenge for the Fascist regime, which approached it both as a threat and an opportunity to shape Italian popular culture. Through the analysis of three case studies, each from a key sector of popular press – comics, general cultural magazines, and women's magazines – and each produced by one of the three main publishing companies in the field – Nerbini, Rizzoli, and Mondadori – the dissertation aims to provide a detailed picture of the development of mass print culture in Italy during Fascism. The analysis provides examples of the impact of and cracks in Fascist censorship and cultural autarchy on the periodical press and argues that the Italian popular press developed in dialogue with European and American culture, which influenced both the form and content of *rotocalchi*, reinterpreting and adapting these models to Italian standards and to the constrictions of Fascist control.

Cambridge, 5 April 2018

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It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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Popular Magazines in Fascist Italy, 1934 – 1943

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the development of mass print culture in Italy during Fascism, focussing on the second half of the 1930s, and on the presence and influence of foreign models. One of the aims of the dissertation is to show how, in spite of the presence of a centralised system of state control over cultural production, foreign models influenced the development of popular press in the Fascist era. In particular, the analysis of 1930s popular magazines is revealing of the presence of a constant dialogue between Italian and foreign cultures, including French, German, and particularly American models.¹

Through the analysis of three magazines chosen as case studies – *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia* – the dissertation aims to provide the first in-depth study of the popular illustrated press in the Fascist era, putting together a range of different sectors and concentrating on both the influence of foreign culture and the impact of the Fascist censorship and cultural autarchy. The three case studies have been chosen as representative of three key sectors of the popular press (comics, general culture, and women) and the three main publishing companies of the time (Nerbini, Rizzoli, and Mondadori).² Taken together, they shed light on both the magazines' development in a crucial period of the 1930s and on the modernisation of the Italian publishing sector in general. The choice of the magazines taken as case studies has been based on the relevance of these publications in the development of an Italian modern popular press; for the innovation they introduced; for their popularity as inferred from available commentaries of

¹ The beginning of the development of mass culture in Italy has been widely defined as coinciding with the Fascist era; see for example Victoria de Grazia, Luisa Passerini, 'Alle origini della cultura di massa. Cultura popolare e fascismo in Italia', *La ricerca folklorica*, 7 (1983), 19–25. In the interwar years the spreading of new forms of consumption influenced society, giving access to lower middle class and some urban working class to new cultural products. Moreover, the Fascist regime has been widely recognised as a mass movement that involved the masses in the cult of the *duce*, aiming for the creation of a widespread culture of consent. See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Renzo De Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1969); Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993); Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); David Forgacs, Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society: From Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Gundle, 'Visions of Prosperity: Consumerism and Popular Culture in Italy from the 1920s to the 1950s', in *Three Postwar Eras in Comparison. Western Europe 1918–1945–1989*, ed. by Carl Levy and Mark Roseman (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 151–172.

² Each magazine has been also taken as a representative example for the three key-publishers. For reason of space, and for the extensive research already carried out on the topic, film magazines have not been included in this analysis. Key studies on illustrated film magazines in Italy in the 1930s include: *Un secolo di cinema a Milano*, ed. by Raffele De Berti (Milan: Il Castoro, 1996); De Berti, 'I rotocalchi illustrati', in *Storia del cinema italiano*, ed. by Orio Caldiron and others, 13 vols (Venice-Rome: Marsilio Edizioni di Bianco & Nero, 2006), V (2006), 512–519; *Riviste italiane di cinema, 1930–1955*, ed. by Davide Turconi (Pavia: Amministrazione provinciale, 1980).

protagonists of the time; and, finally, to fill a gap in the field and provide new interpretations and elements to better understand the development of Italian *rotocalchi*.

The dissertation focuses on the years 1934–1943, that is to say from the publication of the first issue of *L'Avventuroso* and the transformation of the Fascist *Ufficio stampa* into the *Sottosegretario di Stato per la Stampa e la Propaganda*, until the fall of the Fascist regime when conditions for the press among many other sectors were dramatically transformed. In other words, 1934 is taken as a key year in the history of Italian popular press: it marked the beginning of the centralisation of the Fascist control over cultural production, and saw the launch of *L'Avventuroso*, which revolutionised Italian comics and disseminated American heroes among young Italian readers.³ By covering the second half of the 1930s, the dissertation also addresses the impact and limits of Fascist censorship and control, in its most intense phase, bringing to light the presence of foreign models in popular press in spite of the campaign for cultural autarchy, which reached its peak after the Abyssinian war.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the political, cultural, and social background against which Italian illustrated popular magazines – from now on referred to as *rotocalchi* – developed. The chapter introduces not only the Fascist organisation of control over cultural production, and therefore over the periodical press, but also the evolution of the Italian publishing industry, which in the interwar years saw the emergence of new publishing companies with a key role in the modernisation and shaping of popular Italian mass press: Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Nerbini. The founders of these publishing companies, Alberto Mondadori, Angelo Rizzoli, and Mario Nerbini, changed Italian magazine production, and their activity as publishers is strictly connected with the Fascist regime, thus proving to be a significant source of information on how the publishing field dialogued with Mussolini's controlling regime.

As the three publishers availed themselves of highly-educated people whilst writing and targeting a mass readership, the analysis of their magazines production is also revealing of the role of the intellectuals in the popular press. Generally speaking, in *rotocalchi* the intellectual

³ As analysed in chapter 2, *L'Avventuroso* is one of the first Italian comic magazines, which in the 1930s were referred to as 'giornaletti', often disdainfully. Comic magazines are here considered as an evolution and part of the wide category of 'children's periodicals'. However, as discussed later on, the development of comic magazines expanded the readership to also include adolescents and young adults, therefore distinguishing themselves from early children's periodicals, only aimed at children.

élite wrote and created a product aimed at the masses, highlighting the complex relationship between intellectuals and the popular audience. Moreover, popular periodicals were also influenced by Fascist cultural policies, which at the same time limited intellectuals' freedom of manoeuvre. In other words, *rotocalchi* reflect a top-down influence on 'popular' culture, shaped by both 'high' culture and the Fascist regime's control over cultural production.

Nonetheless, the content of popular magazines was not shaped only from the top: *rotocalchi* also reflected the people's taste, influencing in turn what the intellectuals wrote about, and the way they did it. As discussed in chapter 1, Cesare Zavattini, for example, recalled how publishing photos of Hollywood stars would increase the number of copies sold of *Novella*, a clear demonstration of how the readers' taste influenced the content of magazines. Gino Visentini, a regular contributor to *Omnibus*, remembered how they created fake Hollywood interviews inspired by American fan magazines and French weeklies, thus shaping the content of *Omnibus* to satisfy those readers who wanted to get an insight into Hollywood's world. As Rizzoli put it, 'il mercato ha sempre ragione'.⁴ This dissertation's starting point is therefore to take *rotocalchi* as a commercial product of their time, which not only reflected the predominant Fascist culture but also new emerging patterns of mass production and the sociocultural context they developed in and contributed to shaping.

Chapters 2 to 4 are each dedicated to one of the three case studies, following both a chronological order of first appearance, and the level of visible impact of both Fascist censorship and foreign models. Chapter 2 examines the comics magazine *L'Avventuroso*, launched in 1934 and based almost entirely on American comics. It was deeply affected by the Fascist ban on foreign comics in 1938, which led to an abrupt interruption of the publication in 1943. Chapter 3 focuses on the general cultural magazine *Omnibus*, launched in 1937 and closed by the Fascist regime in 1939; although its similarity with foreign magazines has been mentioned by previous scholarship, as discussed throughout the chapter, this dissertation aims to study in greater depth and assess the impact of foreign models in the shaping of what is known as the first Italian *rotocalco*. Finally, chapter 4 analyses *Grazia*, launched at the end of 1938 as a specifically Italian

⁴ Alberto Mazzuca, *La erre verde. Ascesa e declino dell'impero Rizzoli* (Milan: Longanesi, 1991), p. 76. Book publishing offers an interesting example of popular culture produced to attract middle class see, for example, the Mondadori's 'Gialli' series, which gave the genre a new literary status and challenged the existing prejudice against crime fiction. See Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction* (Jefferson: McFarland & C, 2014), pp. 12–13; Vittorio Spinazzola, 'Scrittori, lettori ed editori nella Milano fra le due guerre', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 8.22 (1981), 163-183 (pp. 171–172).

women's magazine shaped according to Fascist culture and values, but with many hybrid elements. A close examination of the issues published from 1938 to 1943, when due to the war the majority of publishers had to stop printing their periodicals, reveals how even a publication steeped in Fascist culture such as this was in fact shaped according to and influenced by varied foreign models and modern attitudes, in this case mainly coming from the United States and France. The analysis of the three case studies further focuses in each case on how models coming from abroad were adapted to the Italian readership and context, suggesting that the study of popular magazines is also revealing of a process of *Italianisation*, a topic that has been often neglected in the scholarly field.

Recent studies have highlighted how it was in the 1930s that a process of Americanisation became visible throughout Western Europe.⁵ Through the examination of the complex presences of American and other influences on popular magazines, the dissertation aims to make a significant contribution to this debate on the processes of the Americanisation of Italian culture by showing how modern Italian culture developed in constant dialogue with not only American culture, but also other European cultures. The analysis suggests that American culture was not the only force shaping and influencing Italian popular press, and further demonstrates the presence of a converse process of Italianisation of foreign models, coming from both the United States and Europe. The examination of *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia* demonstrates the presence of a multicultural dialogue which shaped the popular press in Italy and beyond.

The dissertation's approach to the study of Italian *rotocalchi* has been interdisciplinary in method, particularly including literary and film studies, material culture, and cultural studies, with a particular focus on cultural, social, and political history. Magazines are approached as a multilayered product, a hybrid form which combines visual representation, modern forms of consumption and advertising, and print culture as well as the political and social circumstances in which they developed. The analysis of 1930s *rotocalchi* has therefore taken into account not

⁵ Key works on Americanisation include: Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); David Ellwood, *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*, ed. by Rob Kroes, R. W. Rydell and Doeko F. J. Bosscher (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Mel van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization: A Critical History of Domestic and Global Influence* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2006).

only the peculiarity of the Fascist regime, which heavily influenced and controlled cultural production through legislation, censorship and institutional control, but also the emergence of a consumeristic culture of consumption and production. In other words, *rotocalchi* have been approached as a product of their time, in which the predominant Fascist culture emerges as much as other international forces and models, revealing how these factors all contributed to shaping the development of a modern Italian mass print culture. The examination of *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia* is thus revealing of the complex dynamic of a printing field caught between commercial needs and ideological pressures. Moreover, this study has also considered the implementation of modern forms of mass production, in technological terms – e.g. the *rotocalco* itself – and in terms of the demands of the readership targeted.

Retracing the readership of 1930s magazines is not a simple task. There are no official circulation or sales records, and even if there were, they would be only vaguely indicative: a magazine can be passed on to friends and family members, making one sample available to different people and thus increasing the number of readers in practice. Furthermore, any analysis of Italian readership must take into account the illiteracy rate, which affected the 27% of the population in 1921 (women 30%, men 25%) and the 21% in 1931 (women 24%, men 17%), and the economic and cultural inequalities between the North and South of Italy, both important factors which affected the spread of mass media in general.⁶ However, testimonies from protagonists of the time shed light by providing a description of at least the targeted readership of the major *rotocalchi*. Zavattini, for example, described these as ‘riviste ancillari scritte per le serve ma lette anche dalle padrone’.⁷ Although Zavattini’s definition refers to women’s magazines, it is still revealing of how *rotocalchi* in general targeted lower classes. Generally speaking, according to Vittorio Spinazzola, ‘occorreva che i filoni e le formule [editoriali] su cui puntare fossero in grado di attrarre anche l’attenzione delle classi subalterne’.⁸ *Rotocalchi* targeted middle and lower-middle class readers, but also lesser-educated classes, distancing

⁶ See *Annuario statistico italiano 1922–1925* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1926) p. 71; *Annuario statistico italiano 1934*, p. 207; Valerio Castronovo, ‘La politica economica del fascismo e il Mezzogiorno’, *Studi storici*, 17.3 (1976), 25–39. See also Emanuele Felice, Giovanni Vecchi, ‘Italy’s Modern Economic Growth, 1861–2011’, *Enterprise and Society*, 16.2 (2015), 225–248; David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880–1980* (Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), particularly pp. 17–25;

⁷ Quoted in De Berti, ‘Il nuovo periodico. Rotocalchi tra fotogiornalismo, cronaca e costume’, in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, ed. by Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milan: Monduzzi Editore, 2009), p. 54.

⁸ Spinazzola, ‘Scrittori, lettori ed editori nella Milano fra le due guerre’, p. 168.

themselves from early periodicals that were aimed at upper or more highly educated classes, as will be discussed further below. The reader of *Omnibus*, for example, could be any literate adult – man or woman – from different cultural backgrounds, as the magazine offered comments on current events, literary, theatre and music reviews, but also Hollywood’s interviews and reviews, comments on sports and fashion. *Grazia* targeted a wide range of women as well, with articles and advice on relationships, housework, parenting, and fashion that could be applied by any woman, be they housewives, secretaries, servants, or adolescents. *L’Avventuroso*, for its part, aimed to entertain all children with no class distinction whatsoever. The innovative formulas of these magazines were well received by the readership, as demonstrated by the high numbers of copies sold reported by former collaborators, and, in the case of *Grazia*, by the longevity of the publication. However, the impact of these magazines on Italian readers was altered and limited by the Fascist regime, which, for example, closed both *Omnibus* and *L’Avventuroso*, and controlled or influenced the content of such publications in general.⁹ All these aspects are treated in the chapters dedicated to the three case studies, whose analysis has been adapted to the different nature of each publication. In *L’Avventuroso*, for example, visual aspects and the influence of American models were more prominent compared to *Omnibus* and *Grazia*. On the other hand, politics played a major role in *Omnibus*, in ways not be found in the other two magazines. Finally, *Grazia* mirrored the contradictions of women’s roles and identities in the Fascist era, and, compared to *L’Avventuroso* and *Omnibus*, is the magazine that was influenced the most by the Fascist rhetoric. Therefore, each magazine has been approached taking into account the different readership targeted, and varying content, form and aims.

The research has been predominantly carried out analysing the magazines of the time, with the exception of *L’Avventuroso*, which has been examined using the 1970s reprintings of the original magazines of the 1930s. This was due to the difficulties of finding the original issues printed in the 1930s by Nerbini, whose archives do not exist anymore – allegedly due to the destruction of the publishing company’s offices by the Fascists in 1943 and by partisan brigades in 1944. Therefore, in this dissertation the research on Nerbini has been carried out using secondary sources, particularly studies on the origins and development of the publishing

⁹ For reasons of space, in spite of their importance, satirical periodicals have been left out of this thesis. On the topic, see *Eia, eia, eia, Alalà! La stampa italiana sotto il fascismo, 1919 - 1943*, ed. by Oreste Del Buono (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971); Niccolò Zapponi, *Il fascismo nella caricatura* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1981); and Adolfo Chiesa, *Come ridevano gli italiani* (Rome: Newton, 1984).

company, such as Francesco Listri's *Il mondo di Nerbini*. Similarly, Rizzoli's archives were not accessible. Although a Fondazione Corriere della Sera exists, and includes in its catalogues Rizzoli's periodicals from the 1930s, the archive is not open and despite various attempts it was not possible to access it. Although the study of Rizzoli's magazines was based on the original copies of the 1930s, available for consultation in many Italian libraries such as the Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome; the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan; and the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence (whose documents from the 1930s are mainly unavailable due to the unfortunate damages caused by the 1966 flooding), the analysis of magazines production and organisation of the editorial staff has been based on secondary sources and, as far as *Omnibus* is concerned, primarily on testimonies given by former collaborators. Mondadori's archives are instead easily accessible thanks to the Fondazione Alberto e Arnoldo Mondadori in Milan, whose archives include not only magazines and books, but also Mondadori's correspondences with authors, collaborators, translators, editors, journalists etc. In addition to primary sources, the study of *Grazia* and Mondadori's role in 1930s popular press has been also based on secondary sources and testimonies of collaborators of the time.

The inaccessibility of some archives, and particularly correspondences and documents from Rizzoli and Nerbini, made the research into the publishing companies' organisation and creation of the magazines challenging. The lack or inaccessibility of such important documents have made interviews and articles by former collaborators a useful source, offering insight into what it was like to work in those publishing companies, and how *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus* and *Grazia* were created and developed throughout the last years of the Fascist regime.

Overall, the dissertation lays out a picture of the deep changes in the Italian popular press in the 1930s, a decade which represents a watershed in mass print culture in Italy. The dissertation aims to fill a gap in the scholarly field, by addressing directly the presence of a multicultural dialogue in the shaping of *rotocalchi* and highlighting the complex dynamics of printing popular magazines under a controlling regime, an aspect that has been generally overlooked or partially studied. Academic studies on the periodical press have mainly focused on 'high' culture products, and on binary debate over so-called 'Fascist' or 'non-Fascist' aspects, meaning that the field is still fragmentary and incomplete, despite a rich field of previous research referred to throughout below. *Rotocalchi* have not been adequately analysed yet as a cultural product which also mirrored the presence of foreign models, among which the seeds of a

process of Americanisation widely visible in post-war Italy can be found. Importantly, the examination of *Omnibus* and *Grazia* in particular also reveal the key presence of European models, variously French, German and British, which as described in chapter 3 and 4 have been only marginally studied. This dissertation, on the contrary, aims to shed light on the international interactions that contributed to the shaping of an innovative product, the *rotocalco*, while at the same time highlighting its Italian specificities, that is to say to offer insight into the adaptation, or *Italianisation*, of all these models. As far as comics are concerned, *L'Avventuroso* offers an interesting example of how, in some fields, American models prevailed over any other foreign influence. As discussed in detail in chapter 2, modern comics developed primarily in the United States and were exported from there to European countries.

Italian popular magazines of the 1930s were a key cultural product of their time and did much to shape as well as symptomatically to reflect the emergent mass cultural field of modern print culture, in both synergy and conflict with the constraints of the Fascist state. As David Abrahamson put it, 'magazines not only reflect or are a product of the social reality of the times, but they also serve a larger and more pro-active function – that they can also be a catalyst, shaping the very social reality of their sociocultural moment'.¹⁰ The analysis of the field of Italian magazines, through the case studies of *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia*, confirms Abrahamson's insight, by shedding light not only on the magazines' production, form and contents, but also on the sociocultural significance and complexity of such product. *Rotocalchi* are a revealing primary source for understanding the changes taking place in cultural practices, production and value over a wide cross-section of Italian culture and society in the closing years of the Fascist era.

¹⁰ David Abrahamson, 'Magazine Exceptionalism', *Journalism Studies*, 8.4 (2007), 667–670 (p. 668).

I. THE FASCIST REGIME, CULTURE AND THE PERIODICAL PRESS

Il fascismo non ha mirato tanto a governare l'Italia, quanto a monopolizzare il controllo delle coscienze italiane [...] vuole il possesso della coscienza privata di tutti i cittadini.

Giovanni Amendola, 1 April 1923.¹

In the interwar years, Italian society experienced significant changes that deeply transformed Italians' habits, establishing the premises for a culture of mass consumption. The rule of the Fascist regime, a modern mass movement – or a mass-based reactionary regime, as defined by Palmiro Togliatti in 1935 –² shaped and conditioned the modernisation of Italian society and culture, promoting the dissemination of a culture aimed at the masses. As some studies have suggested, Italian cultural production was heavily influenced by the Fascist regime and its totalitarian ideology, which aimed to build popular consensus, control public opinion and educate the Italians according to its values. In other words, the totalitarian project of the Fascist regime aimed at controlling not only the State, the people and their conscience, but also cultural production and dissemination.³ However, the cultural industry was already developing as a mass

¹ Giovanni Amendola, *Il Mondo*, 1 April 1923.

² See Palmiro Togliatti, *Sul fascismo*, ed. by Giuseppe Vacca (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. xcvi-xcvi, and p. 71.

³ See Edward R. Tannenbaum, *Fascism in Italy: Society and Culture 1922 - 1943* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), particularly p. 3; and Doug Thompson, *State Control in Fascist Italy. Culture and Conformity, 1925-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), particularly pp. 98-139. On the Fascist organisation of education see also Mario Isnenghi, *L'educazione dell'italiano: il fascismo e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Bologna, Cappelli, 1979); Alessandra Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista* (Milan: Il Mulino, 2011); Albertina Vittoria, 'Scuola e apparati educative del fascismo', *Studi storici*, 22.2 (1981), 453-463. Starting from the theses of scholars such as Renzo De Felice, Giovanni Gentile, Alberto Aquarone, and, more broadly, Hannah Arendt, the questions of whether the Fascist regime was a totalitarian regime or not is still hotly debated. This dissertation does not aim to address this issue; the term 'totalitarian' is here used as intended by Giovanni Amendola – the first to define the Fascist regime as a totalitarian system for its aiming at 'dominio assoluto e dello spadroneggiamento completo e incontrollato nel campo della vita politica e amministrativa' (*Il Mondo*, 13 May 1923) – and by Mussolini himself: 'Occorre, dopo il partito unico, lo Stato totalitario, cioè lo Stato che assorba in sé, per trasformarla e potenziarla, tutta l'energia, tutti gli interessi, tutta la Speranza di un popolo'. Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e discorsi*, 12 vols (Milan: Hoepli, 1934-1938), VIII, p. 273. On totalitarianism and fascism, see also Richard J. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998); Jean-Yves Dormagen, *Logiques du fascisme. L'État totalitaire en Italie* (Paris: Fayard, 2008); Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

production and distribution industry, driven as much by profitability as by state intervention.⁴ At the same time, models coming from abroad were influencing Italian cultural production and the people's taste, as the case of film production clearly demonstrates.⁵ In the dissemination of foreign ideas, advertising also played an important role, particularly in the spreading of a consumeristic culture that came mostly from the United States. The Fascist regime saw the emergence of this culture of consumption as dangerous for its totalitarian project, as it fuelled personal aspirations that worked against the submission of the individual to the state. American advertising was indeed spreading a consumer culture focused on the self that contrasted with the Fascist focus on the collective.⁶ However, the campaign for the autarchy launched in 1936, as a response to the economic sanctions against Italy, indirectly encouraged the expansion of consumption. As part of the autarchic campaign, Italian products were exalted and their purchase promoted as an act of patriotism, thus making consumption an element for the growth of the nation. In other words, the Fascist regime promoted the creation of a 'consumatore italiano', whose consumption was guided by the state.⁷ Moreover, in the process of the centralisation of cultural production and education within the Fascist state, consumption became a concern and a significant element of the construction of Fascist society. Strictly connected to the emergence of the masses as protagonists of the Fascist state, the emerging consumerism was seen as a means of control: by standardising the people's demands, the Fascist regime aimed to put the collective's needs at the centre and use consumer goods to shape a specifically Fascist modernity. In the 1930s, the expansion of advertising deeply affected the press: not only did advertising become a crucial element of a magazine's revenue, but it also deeply changed its

⁴ See Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era*, p. 3; Forgacs, 'How Exceptional was Twentieth-Century Italy?', in *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*, ed. by Guido Bonsaver and Robert S. C. Gordon (Oxford: Legenda, 2005), pp. 9–19, particularly pp. 9–11.

⁵ Among the numerous studies on Italian film production in the Fascist era, see Orio Caldiron, *Il lungo viaggio del cinema italiano. Antologia di "Cinema" 1936–1943* (Verona: Marsilio, 1965); Claudio Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero* (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1974); Victoria de Grazia, 'Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920–1960', *The Journal of Modern History*, 61.1 (1989), 53–87; Luigi Freddi, *Il Cinema. Il governo dell'immagine* (Rome: Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia Gremese Editore, 1994); Stephen Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Daniela Manetti, *Un'arma poderosissima. Industria cinematografica e Stato durante il fascismo, 1922–1943* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012).

⁶ Adam Arvidsson, 'Between Fascism and the American Dream: Advertising in Interwar Italy', *Social Science History*, 25.2 (2001), 151–186 (pp. 154–155); Bianca Gaudenzi, 'Press Advertising and the Fascist Dictates', *Journalism Studies*, 14.5 (2013), 663–680 (pp. 664–666); Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Lo spettacolo del fascismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), p. 28 and p. 192.

⁷ Emanuela Scarpellini, *L'Italia dei consumi: dalla Belle époque al nuovo millennio* (Rome: Laterza, 2008), pp. 92–93.

appearance.⁸ In other words, the development of advertising, despite the Fascist intervention in the field, contributed to the spreading of foreign lifestyles – and lifestyle aspirations – which influenced both the content and look of magazines and, consequently, the readers' consumer demands.

In this context, the periodical press can be used as a revealing source that mirrored not only cultural changes, and the Fascist regime's intervention and influence on cultural production, but also the modernisation of Italian society and the impact of foreign models. In particular, the dissemination of a new product aimed at the masses in the 1930s, the *rotocalco*, offers a particularly interesting starting point for analysing the development of a modern mass press and culture within the peculiar dynamics of a controlling regime, and of the mixed national and international forces that shaped it, as this dissertation aims to demonstrate through the detailed examination of three case studies of popular magazines.⁹ The commercial nature of the *rotocalco*, its mass production, and targeted distribution demonstrate the complexity of cultural production in the Fascist era and the emerging mass consumption culture. Moreover, although the Fascist regime considered the manipulation of the press a crucial element for establishing its power and consensus, periodicals had a certain margin of freedom thanks to their nature as entertainment products. While daily newspapers were heavily influenced by politics, and were a 'necessità sociale irrinunciabile', the purchase of a magazine reflected more directly the preferences of the readers.¹⁰ In other words, periodicals were a commercial product created and moulded in order to gain as many readers as possible, and their entertaining nature gave them a certain freedom under a controlling regime such as Fascism. Nonetheless, magazines cannot be considered as an isolated phenomenon: they were subject to a series of Fascist cultural controls and had to comply with Fascist directives in terms of what could be published and what was forbidden. At the same time, in the *rotocalchi* modern forms of consumption and models coming mainly from overseas found space for expression, meeting the demands of an emerging modern

⁸ Arvidsson, 'Between Fascism and the American Dream', p. 160; Gaudenzi, 'Press Advertising and the Fascist Dictates', p. 666.

⁹ The term 'mass' refers to both circulation and production methods. On the history of popular magazines see *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture. Vol. 6, US Popular Print Culture 1860-1920*, ed. by Christine Bold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: SAGE, 2002); Tim N. Gidal, *Modern Photojournalism: Origin and Evolution, 1910-1933* (New York: Collier Books, 1973); *The Press and Popular Culture in Interwar Europe*, ed. by Sarah Newnam and Matt Houlbrook (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁰ Nello Ajello, 'Il settimanale di attualità', *La stampa italiana del neocapitalismo*, ed. by Paolo Murialdi, Valerio Castronovo, Nicola Tranfaglia (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1976), pp. 173-250 (p. 176).

readership influenced by foreign models mainly brought to popularity by American films and advertising. As Nello Ajello put it, in one of the most influential studies on the Italian periodical press:

ciascun periodico illustrato [...] rafforza e sfrutta più o meno apertamente le tendenze politico culturali dei propri lettori, i quali costituiscono un settore ben individuato [...] l'acquisto di un periodico è un atto intenzionale [perciò] la stampa periodica è in grado di fornire nel suo complesso una *diagnosi* del costume italiano, o almeno una esplorazione sociologica discretamente attendibile dei propri lettori.¹¹

Unfortunately, due to the lack of official statistics it is not possible to establish how many periodicals were published in the 1930s. The last data on periodical publications provided by the *Istituto nazionale di statistica* (Istat) refers to 1929, when there were overall 473 weeklies published, and a total of 2946 periodicals.¹² However, it is possible to analyse the statistics provided by the *annuari* published between 1881 and 1932, which indicate a constant growth in the number of periodicals published until 1928, when a fall in numbers is registered. This data confirms the increasing popularity of the periodical press and seems also to reflect the more restrictive press regulation introduced by the Fascist regime. In 1912 there were 3341 periodicals published, while in 1928 the number fell to 3030, and in 1929 to 2946.¹³ Despite the lack of data on periodicals after 1929, the study of *rotocalchi* reveals that the field grew rapidly in the 1930s. In particular, this decade was characterised by the production of an increasing number of weeklies which targeted a specific readership and covered several distinct areas of focus and specialisations, such as women's magazines, literature, arts and current affairs magazines, and the introduction of comic magazines. For example, whereas between 1881 and 1919 there were only a few established women's periodicals mainly aimed at the bourgeoisie – such as *Cordelia* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1881–1942), *La Donna* (Turin: La Stampa and Rome: La Tribuna, 1905–1922, then Milan: Mondadori, 1922–1926), and *Lidel* (Milan: Lidel, 1919–1935) – between 1933 and 1938 the most successful and longest-running women's *rotocalchi*, which targeted also less-educated women, were launched. These included: *Eva: settimanale per la donna italiana* (Milan: Vitaliano, 1933–1936, then Rusconi, 1936–1968), *Gioia!* (Milan: Rusconi, 1937–2006), *Annabella* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1938 –; previously *Lei* 1933–1938), and *Grazia: un'amica al vostro*

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Annuario statistico*, 1932, p. 122.

¹³ *Annuario statistico*, 1916, 1930 and 1932, pp. 100, 108 and 122 respectively.

fianco (Milan: Mondadori, 1938 –). The layout introduced by these magazines can be traced in post-war magazines. The same can be said for illustrated general cultural magazines, in which photographs are the main feature and means of information of the magazine, whose first prototype in Italy was *Omnibus* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1937–1939), followed by weeklies such as *Tempo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1939–1976), and *Panorama* (Milan: Mondadori, 1939 –), and whose layout was maintained by post-war magazines such as *Europeo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1945–1947, then *Domus*, 1945–2013) and *L'Espresso* (Rome: N.E.R, 1955 –). Not only did magazines begin to target a wider range of readers in the 1930s, but their layout, and approach to the readership, which can be found in post-war Italian magazines, highlights how the emergence of *rotocalchi* in the 1930s represents a watershed in the history of Italian popular press. Comic magazines also offer a clear example of this; comic weeklies flourished in the 1930s, defined as the years of the ‘comic craze’ by Leonardo Gori, Fabio Gadducci and Sergio Lama, authors of one of the most comprehensive studies on comics, *Eccetto Topolino*.¹⁴ The analysis of the number of comic and children’s magazines published since the beginning of the twentieth century shows the rapid growth of these publications in the 1930s: between 1900 and 1922 approximately six periodicals were launched, followed by only a few new publications – mainly Fascist – between 1922 and 1929, whereas between 1932 and 1937 more than thirteen comic magazines were launched, among which the long-running *Topolino* and *Il Vittorioso*.

1900–1920	1920–1929	1930–1940
<i>Il Novellino</i> (Rome: Calzone – Villa, 1898–1927)	<i>Il Giornale del Balilla</i> (Milan: Imperia, 1923–1943)	<i>Jumbo</i> (Milan: SAEV, 1932–1938)
<i>Giornalino della domenica</i> (Florence: Bemporad, 1906–1911; Florence: Giornalino della Domenica ed., 1918–1920; Rome: Alfieri &	<i>Il Giornalino</i> (Rome: Pia Società S. Paolo, 1924–1943)	<i>Topolino</i> (Milan: Rizzoli, 1932–1935; Milan: Mondadori: 1935 –)

¹⁴ Fabio Gadducci, Leonardo Gori, Sergio Lama, *Eccetto Topolino. Lo scontro culturale tra Fascismo e Fumetti*. (Rome: Nicola Pesce Editore, 2011), pp. 18–85 and pp. 125–128.

Lacroix, 1920; Milan: Vamba, 1922–24 and Milan: Mondadori, 1925– 927)		
<i>Corriere dei piccoli</i> (Milan: Corriere della Sera, 1908– 1995)	<i>La Piccola Italiana</i> (Milan: Imperia, 1927–1943)	<i>Rin–Tin–Tin</i> (Milan: SAEV, 1933–1937)
<i>Illustrazione dei piccoli</i> (Turin: Edizioni Moderne, 1914–1928)		<i>Primarosa</i> (Milan: SAEV, 1933 – 1937)
<i>L'Intrepido</i> (Turin: Edizioni Moderne, 1919–1929)		<i>Il Monello</i> (Milan: Universo, 1933–1939)
<i>Donnina</i> (Turin: Edizioni Moderne, 1915–1929)		<i>L'Audace</i> (Milan: SAEV, 1934–1940)
		<i>L'Avventuroso</i> (Florence: Nerbini, 1934–1943)
		<i>La Risata</i> (Milan: Moderna, 1934–1936)
		<i>Bombolo</i> (Milan: SAEV, 1934–1935; then <i>Cine– Comico</i> 1935–1936)
		<i>I tre porcellini</i> (Milan: Mondadori, 1935–1937)
		<i>L'Intrepido</i> (Milan: Moderna, 1935–1943)

		<i>Il giornale di Cino e Franco</i> (Florence: Nerbini, 1935–1938)
		<i>Giungla!</i> (Florence: Nerbini, 1937–1941)
		<i>Il Vittorioso</i> (Rome: AVE, 1937–1966)

Table 1: comic magazines published in Italy between 1898 and 1937

In post-war Italy, comic magazines maintained the layout and content structure launched in the 1930s, visible in popular Italian comic series such as *Tex* (Milan: Sergio Bonelli, 1948–), and *Il grande Blek* (Milan: Dardo, 1954–1965).

The three *rotocalchi* examined in this thesis are taken as key-magazines representative of three key different areas: *L'Avventuroso* (comic magazines); *Omnibus* (general cultural magazines); and *Grazia* (women's magazines). These three case studies clearly show the forms and patterns of innovation introduced in the popular press through the newly expanded rotogravure printing technology, the subsequent expansion of the readership, the industrialisation and expansion of popular press, and, finally, the influence of both the Fascist regime and foreign models on magazines.

For the understanding of the Fascist regime's impact on the popular press, it is crucial to understand the regime's cultural politics and how it organised its control over culture.¹⁵ The systematic control of the Fascist regime over cultural production started from the early years of Fascist government. In particular, the first form of censorship was established in 1926 with the *Testo Unico di Pubblica Sicurezza* approved in November 1926 and expanded with the R.D. 773 of June 1931, which stated that any publication needed a permit from the local authority of

¹⁵ Key studies include: Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *La cultura fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000); Guido Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1975); Valerio Ferme, *Tradurre è tradire: la traduzione come sovversione culturale sotto il fascismo* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002); Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *L'autarchia della cultura. Intellettuali e fascismo negli anni trenta* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1983); Gianni Spulcioni, *L'organizzazione del consenso nel ventennio fascista* (Rome: Aracne, 2014); Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998).

pubblica sicurezza, forbade any mention of abortion, suicide or crime, and established the consequences for those who violated the regulation: ‘i giornali o gli scritti periodici, con cui si contravviene alle disposizioni [...] sono sequestrati in via amministrativa dall’autorità locale di pubblica sicurezza’.¹⁶ Under this regulation, any publication could be sequestered *after* having been distributed, and the main focus of censorship was on providing an image of Italy as a disciplined country where there was no violence.¹⁷ However, as analysed further below, in 1934 the Fascist regime put in place an enhanced system of censorship, which allowed the government to stop the distribution of any publication, therefore creating a system of *preventive* censorship. The steps towards the establishment of a structured control over press and culture, which was built at the same pace as the theorisation of the Fascist idea of a culture for the masses, are explored in section 1.1 of this chapter. Strictly connected to the control over cultural production was the creation of a state-controlled culture, ‘cultura popolare’, a crucial aspect analysed in section 1.2, which focuses on both the practical organisation of the dissemination of *cultura popolare* and its formal institution: the *Ministero della Cultura Popolare*. These two sections aim to provide the necessary context to understand the significance of the production of modern *rotocalchi*, whose origins are outlined in section 2. In particular, section 2.1 introduces the evolution of the illustrated periodical press in Italy, followed by a brief overview of European illustrated weeklies of the 1920s which provided key models for Italian *rotocalchi*; this introduction to Italian illustrated magazines shows how, despite the influence and regulation of the Fascist regime, the Italian popular press evolved in dialogue with European and American cultures. Section 2.2 focuses on the main publishing companies whose activity in the 1930s shaped modern Italian popular magazines, that is Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Nerbini; and section 2.3 introduces their complex relationship with the Fascist regime. Finally, section 3 focuses on the United States, investigating the ambivalent relationship the Fascist regime had with America, and highlighting similarities and differences between American popular magazines and Italian *rotocalchi*. This focus on American cultural models reveals how, despite the Fascist campaign for cultural autarchy and particularly its anti-Americanism, modern Italian culture developed in a

¹⁶ RD 18 June 1931 nr 773, ‘Testo unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza’, *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, 26 June 1931.

¹⁷ See Nicola Tranfaglia, *La stampa del regime. Le veline del Minculpop per orientare l’informazione* (Milan: Bompiani, 2005), particularly ‘Società, economia e cultura’, pp. 164–221.

constant dialogue also with American culture, whose influence on Italian society was already visible in the 1930s.

1.1 From the *Ufficio stampa* to the *Ministero della Cultura Popolare*

The role of the Fascist regime in controlling the press, manipulating the news and its intervention in cultural production has been recognised and addressed by many studies in the field.¹⁸ As Cannistraro put it, in one of the earliest and most influential studies of this question, ‘sotto il fascismo la stampa doveva [...] essere uno strumento dello Stato, rivolto agli interessi della nazione [...] veicolo dell’avanzamento sociale e politico di tutti i cittadini’; it was ‘il canale principale attraverso il quale il regime trasmetteva le linee della sua politica interna’ and moulded public opinion.¹⁹ The press had a crucial role within the Fascist regime, it was a means of propaganda for disseminating Fascist policies and ideology, and the instrument through which the regime removed any hostile voices and imposed its own. Between 1923 and 1928, the regime started to exercise and perfect its control over the press systematically, mainly through the *Ufficio stampa del capo del governo*, and the approval of a series of laws and decrees created *ad hoc*, such as the R.D. 3288 (15 July 1923), and the decree nr 2307 (31 December 1925).²⁰

The press regulation approved between 1923 and 1925 affected both the daily and the periodical press, and gave to the prefects the power to confiscate and suppress any publication whose content was judged against national interests.²¹ The decree approved in 1925, for example, defined the legal responsibility of periodical publications introducing the figure of *direttore responsabile*, the editor in chief, who was supposed to be aware of what was being

¹⁸ Key studies include: Riccardo Cassero, *Le veline del duce* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2004); Mauro Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio: strutture e trasformazioni nello stato totalitario* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005); Paolo Murialdi, *La stampa del regime fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1986); *La stampa italiana del neocapitalismo; La stampa italiana nell’età fascista*, ed. by Nicola Tranfaglia, Paolo Murialdi, Massimo Legnani (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1980); Nicola Tranfaglia, *Stampa e sistema politico nell’Italia unita: la metamorfosi del quarto potere* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1986).

¹⁹ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 174.

²⁰ On the Fascist press regulation see Spulcioni, *L’organizzazione del consenso*, pp. 202 – 222.

²¹ R.D. nr. 3288 ‘Norme sulla gerenza e vigilanza dei giornali e delle pubblicazioni periodiche’, in *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, 11 July 1924. The decree introduced the figure of the *gerente responsabile* for periodical publications, which coincided with the *direttore* or the *redattore capo* and had to be approved by the *prefetto*. This regulation, which also excluded members of the parliament from the role of *gerente responsabile* for any publication, gave the government the power of controlling periodical publications as the *prefetti* could potentially refuse to approve a *gerente*. Spulcioni, *L’organizzazione del consenso*, pp. 205 – 206; Mauro Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio*, pp. 26 – 29, and 51 – 56.

published in the magazine and was legally responsible for all content. The *direttore responsabile* had to be approved by the *procuratore generale* of the *Corte d'Appello*, who also needed to know the personal details of owner and printer of each periodical, providing the regime with detailed information on whom was working in any publication. In March 1926, another decree established that the *Corte d'Appello* would need to do a background check on the editor in chief before approving him and to pass on the information to the prefect.²² Through these decrees, the Fascist regime therefore obtained the power to approve or decline any request for a new publication based on the arbitrary decision of the prefects. Finally, in 1928, the R.D. 384 established the rules for the *Albo professionale dei giornalisti*, which extended the regime's power of control over journalists:

Prima di provvedere sulla iscrizione il Comitato domanderà al Prefetto della provincia, in cui il richiedente risiede, *un'attestazione sulla condotta politica* di questo ultimo, per stabilire se alla iscrizione osti il motivo indicato nel secondo capoverso dell'art. 5 [In nessun caso possono essere iscritti e, qualora vi si trovino iscritti, devono essere cancellati, coloro che abbiano svolto una pubblica attività in contraddizione con gli interessi della Nazione].²³

These decrees demonstrate how, within five years of coming to power, the Fascist regime had built a press regulation system that granted the government widespread control over the press, both daily and periodical, including editors, journalists and authors. Between 1925 and 1926, moreover, Mussolini carried out a process of *fascistizzazione integrale* of the daily press: rather than eliminate all newspapers against or not openly in favour of the regime, Mussolini forcibly took them over, and used the prestige of publications such as *La Stampa* and *Il Corriere della Sera* to build control and consensus among the people. During this process, the *Ufficio stampa* became the institution through which Mussolini distributed his orders to the press – the so called *veline* –, which together with the *Agenzia Stefani* constituted the regime's operational arm for controlling the press and manipulating the information.²⁴

²² R.D.L. 4 March 1926, *ibid.*, p. 215.

²³ R. D. 26 February 1928, nr 384, 'Norme per la istituzione dell'albo professionale dei giornalisti', *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, 13 March 1928, quoted in *Annuario della stampa italiana*, 8.1 (1930), 127 – 131 (emphasis mine).

²⁴ The *Agenzia Stefani* was established in 1853 and from 1924 was led by Manlio Morgagni, a *sansepolcrista*. In the Fascist era, not only was Stefani the only news agency, but it was also the authorised organisation for the distribution of the government's press releases, the PNF and Mussolini's speeches and any other news regarding the regime, taking over the former role of the *Ufficio stampa*. On the *Agenzia Stefani*, see Romano Canosa, *La voce del duce. L'agenzia Stefani, l'arma segreta di Mussolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002).

At the same time, Mussolini also unified and put under central control the press of the PNF, which locally produced many publications that had had – until then – a certain autonomy. As a result, by 1926 the daily press was an instrument to build consensus around Mussolini and the regime, and a major means of propaganda.²⁵ In the aftermath of the approval of the *leggi fascistiche* in 1925–26, the press was declared to be an element of the totalitarian State: ‘In un regime totalitario, come dev’essere necessariamente un regime sorto da una rivoluzione trionfante, la stampa è un elemento di questo regime, una forza al servizio di questo regime’.²⁶

The attention Mussolini, a former journalist, paid to the press, and particularly to controlling its precise operations rather than simply silencing any voices hostile to the regime, demonstrates that he had understood the importance of this medium – and subsequently of the emerging mass media such as radio and cinema – which he used to disseminate an ideal image of Fascist Italy both within and outside Italy.²⁷ Moreover, it shows how the Fascist regime paid particular attention to modern media and their role within society, seen as playing ‘un ruolo attivo, di costruzione del consenso popolare’.²⁸ By the end of the 1920s, the Fascist regime had imposed on the press its rhetoric and, through *disposizioni e ordini alla stampa*, aimed to shape a new ‘fascist culture’ to replace the old liberal Italian culture.²⁹ Thus, according to this project, the press had a key role:

Il Gran Consiglio, esaminato il problema della stampa in funzione di regime di Partito [...] riafferma la funzione *educativa* della stampa e la necessità che essa sia permeata e modellata dallo spirito fascista [...] e riconoscendo la necessità che il regime possa contare incondizionatamente sui più importanti organi giornalistici, affida al segretario generale del Partito l’esame del problema, fermo restando il concetto che i posti di direzione e di comando devono essere affidati a camicie nere fedelissime.³⁰

²⁵ *La stampa italiana nell’età fascista*, pp. 33–42.

²⁶ Benito Mussolini, ‘Il giornalismo come missione’, 10 October 1938, *Opera Omnia*, ed. by Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, 35 vols (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), XXIII, pp. 230–234 (230).

²⁷ On the radio and the Fascist regime see Alberto Monticone, *Il Fascismo al microfono: radio e politica in Italia (1924–1945)* (Rome: Studium, 1978); Gianni Isola, *L’ha scritto la radio: storia e testi della radio durante il fascismo (1924–1944)* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998). On cinema see Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1895–1945* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1979); *Cinema a passo romano: trent’anni di fascismo sullo schermo (1934–1963)*, ed. by Pietro Cavallo, Luigi Goglia, Pasquale Iaccio (Naples: Liguori, 2012).

²⁸ Tranfaglia, *La stampa del regime*, p. 11.

²⁹ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, pp. 192–194; Spulcioni, *L’organizzazione del consenso*, pp. 200–222.

³⁰ ‘88° riunione del Gran Consiglio del Fascismo’, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 17 November 1927, *Opera Omnia*, XXIII, pp. 68 – 69 (emphasis mine).

The idea of the press as a means of education of the masses remained one of the leitmotifs of the regime until its end. By disseminating Fascist ideology and culture, the press was to contribute to the consensus of the masses to the regime and its leader: 'la stampa nazionale, regionale e provinciale serve il regime illustrandone l'opera quotidiana, creando e mantenendo un ambiente di consenso intorno a quest'opera'.³¹

The control over the press was perfected and extended in the 1930s, starting in 1933, which marks the beginning of a new phase in the Fascist regime's control over press and culture. That year, the nomination in August of Galeazzo Ciano as head of the *Ufficio stampa*, only a few weeks after Goebbels' visit to Italy, accelerated the reformation of the Press Office and promoted a more active and centralised control over press and cultural production. This resulted in the evolution of the *Ufficio stampa* into a *Sottosegretariato di Stato per la stampa e la propaganda* (1934), headed by Ciano, which coordinated the regime's propaganda and control over all means of communication and culture. The transformation of the *Ufficio stampa* into a *Sottosegretariato* was substantial: from about 35 people employed in the former, the number of people working in the latter reached 686.³² It was comprised of three *direzioni generali* – *per la stampa italiana*, *per la stampa estera* and *per la propaganda* – and expanded the jurisdiction of the previous press office, taking over the *Ministero delle corporazioni e dell'Interno*, *Commissariato per il Turismo*, and the *Ministero dell'educazione nazionale* as far as these dealt with cinema, censorship, tourism, theatre and music.³³ This process of centralisation of control over culture – and its censorship – was consistent with the Fascist plan of moulding Italian society, but was also heavily influenced by the rise to power of Hitler in 1933 and, in particular, by Goebbels' organisation of the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

If 1933 is a key date for the reorganisation of the press under the Fascist control, 1934 represents a crucial date for the establishment of Fascist censorship. On 3 April 1934, a circular from the Ministry of the Interior, signed by Mussolini, ordered publishers to send to the prefectures three copies of their final product to have their distribution approved: 'tutti gli editori o stampatori di qualsiasi pubblicazione o disegno, anche di carattere periodico, dovranno prima di metterli in vendita aut comunque effettuarne diffusione, presentare tre copie di ciascuna

³¹ Mussolini, 'Il giornalismo come missione', p. 230.

³² Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy*, p. 110.

³³ See R.D.L. 6 September 1934, nr 1434. See also RDL 24 October 1935, which gave Ciano the authority to directly order sequestrations to prefects.

pubblicazione alla Prefettura'.³⁴ The new regulation established that any publication could be sequestered *before* being distributed, and *after* its publication, in practice forcing the publishing companies to self-censor their publications in order to avoid financial losses in case the government stopped the distribution.³⁵ This form of preventive censorship had two major consequences: it gave control to the government over any publication before people could read it, and formally maintained freedom of press, as in theory publishers could print anything they wanted, although in practice they could not distribute their products before the regime's approval. More importantly, the ministerial circular changed the centre of power of censorship: from the Ministry of the Interior to the Press Office led by Ciano.³⁶ This system allowed the regime to keep under control the content of magazines and, particularly, silence any voices hostile to the regime.

The centralisation of control over the press led to the creation, in June 1935, of an autonomous administrative organisation with a centralised control over press and culture – instituted and shaped on the example set by Goebbels: the *Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda*. It was comprised of six *direzioni generali* – three more than the *Sottosegretariato* – and its jurisdiction was further expanded to include radio broadcasting and cultural production.³⁷ According to the Fascist totalitarian project, cultural production had to be controlled and organised by the regime. It was thus between 1934 and 1935 that the Fascist regime started to focus broadly on cultural production. This evolution had a crucial impact on the theorisation of *cultura popolare*, a concept that the Fascist regime developed in those years to reach the masses and mould the new Italian, as analysed in more detail below. For these reasons, this thesis focuses on the years between 1934 and 1943, that is from the beginning of an organised system of censorship and control of cultural production, until the end of the Fascist regime, a period which also coincided with the publication of revolutionary magazines that changed the Italian press industry, such as the three case studies examined here: *L'Avventuroso*, launched in 1934, *Omnibus* in 1937 and *Grazia* in 1938.

³⁴ Quoted in Giorgio Fabre, *L'elenco: censura fascista, editoria e autori ebrei* (Turin: S. Zamorani editore, 1998), p. 22.

³⁵ George Talbot, *Censorship in fascist Italy. 1922-43* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 141.

³⁶ Fabre, *L'elenco*, pp. 22-27.

³⁷ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, pp. 101–107; Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio*, pp. 115–120; Tranfaglia, *La stampa del regime*, pp. 29–30. See also R.D.L. 24 September 1935, nr 1009.

The year 1936 marks another important change: Dino Alfieri was officially appointed in June as the head of the *Ministero*, whose powers were expanded due to the war against Ethiopia and the consequent need of a strong propaganda campaign to sustain the war effort. It was also another crucial step towards the regime's control over cultural institutions, which were used to disseminate Fascist propaganda at all levels of society. For the first time, Alfieri involved cultural institutions such as the *Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista*, the *Accademia d'Italia*, and the *Dante Alighieri* to counterbalance foreign propaganda against Italy – mainly French and British – by disseminating messages of an Italian civilising mission in Africa. Moreover, the *Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda* was now the highest authority for all matters of censorship, taking over the Ministry of the Interior, and centralising all power of decision on the matter.³⁸ One year after its creation, the government also expanded the jurisdiction of the *Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda* taking under its control sixteen cultural institutions, including the *Istituto LUCE*, the *Ente Nazionale Italiano del Turismo*, the *Istituto nazionale del dramma antico*, the *Discoteca di Stato*, and the *Enti provinciali per il turismo*.³⁹ This centralisation of control over culture aimed to make the Ministry able to control cultural production and make sure that 'tutto ciò che si presenta[va] alle masse attraverso giornali, libri, radio, teatro e cinema [fosse] governato da un chiaro e sincero spirito fascista'.⁴⁰

It can thus be said that between 1933 and 1936 the Fascist regime's cultural policies were at their most extensive and systematic level, and its power of control centralised in a structured administrative institution, the *Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda*. The progressive monopolisation of control over culture – and the regime's extensive use of mass media to involve all social classes – can also be seen as part of the process for the creation of a totalitarian State. However, as far as popular culture and the popular press in particular – the main focus of this thesis – are concerned, the importance of the creation of the *Ministero per la Stampa e la*

³⁸ Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy*, p. 117.

³⁹ The *Istituto LUCE* was established in 1925 as part of the conception of the regime of cinema as 'uno strumento di comunicazione politica, di consenso e irragionevolezza delle masse', whose final aim was 'la diffusione della cultura popolare e della istruzione generale per mezzo delle visioni cinematografiche'. Manetti, *Un'arma poderosissima*, pp. 49-51. See R.D.L. 24 September 1936, nr 1834, which gave to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda the power to nominate press officers of prefectures, a power that until then was of the Ministry of the Interior. It is worth noting that one year earlier, on 27 August 1924, the URI was created as part of the regime's aim to control mass media.

⁴⁰ 'Relazione di Dino Alfieri al Senato del 1937', in ACS, MCP, b. 113, f. 2, *Alfieri Dino* quoted in Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Burocrazia e politica culturale nello stato fascista: Il Ministero della cultura popolare', in *Il regime fascista*, ed. by Alberto Aquarone and Maurizio Vernassa (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1974), pp. 169-193 (p. 182).

Propaganda lies in its aim of *educating* the masses and elevating popular culture in order to overcome class distinctions, and create a *cultura fascista* that would put into practice Mussolini's ambitious plan to '*andare al popolo*'.⁴¹ As Cannistraro explains, 'non solo il nuovo ministero avrebbe stimolato l'emergere della lungamente attesa "cultura fascista", ma – cosa più importante – la congiunzione di propaganda e politica culturale avrebbe messo in grado il regime di raggiungere le masse in modo diretto e non superficiale'.⁴² In 1937, the ministry was given the new name of *Ministero per la Cultura popolare* (Minculpop), reflecting the interest of the regime in culture, and eliminating the word 'propaganda', which by then was perceived negatively.⁴³

1.2 The Minculpop and *cultura popolare*

The use of the expression 'cultura popolare' reflected the commitment of the regime to the field of culture, highlighting the role of Fascism in disseminating its culture at all levels of society. Moreover, as the word 'popolare' was used to indicate a culture available to everyone, the term also reflected the nature of the Fascist regime, which required the participation of the masses in national life – and thus mirroring the importance of the masses within the Fascist state. In other words, due to the role of the masses in the Fascist ideology, the regime aimed to enhance popular culture and make it as valuable as 'high' culture in order to involve the masses in the nation's cultural life. In practice, *cultura popolare* meant the education of the masses according to Fascist values through a state-controlled culture created centrally to disseminate Fascist ideology and change Italian habits. As stated in *Il Popolo d'Italia* in 1937, *cultura popolare* 'è, nella definizione, e dovrà esserlo nella realtà, lo sbocco conclusivo di tutta l'opera e dei complessi

⁴¹ 'Nel campo della cultura bisogna andare al popolo. Bisogna andarvi [...] in estensione e soprattutto in profondità', Mussolini, 'Anche nel campo della cultura bisogna andare al popolo', 31 October 1936, *Opera Omnia*, XXVIII, p. 66.

⁴² Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 130.

⁴³ Giovanni Gentile affirmed that *propaganda* was a 'brutta parola accennante a una brutta velleità di sopraffare gli altri con le nostre idee [...] propinate con ogni mezzo di allettativa e di sorpresa sugli spiriti più ingenui', quoted in Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio*, p. 102. According to Ermanno Amicucci, 'la nuova denominazione [del ministero] indica chiaramente un programma di lavoro, un orientamento, una volontà che rispondono perfettamente alla parola d'ordine data dal Duce a tutti i settori della vita nazionale: andare verso il popolo!', quoted in Forno, p. 102.

sforzi della Rivoluzione, per dare al popolo consapevolezza fascista, spirito fascista, slancio, equilibrio e giudizio fascista'.⁴⁴

The creation of the Minculpop was thus intended to lead Italian cultural life and control all cultural production and dissemination. It was organised in seven *direzioni generali* – and one *ispettorato* – among which there were two *direzioni generali* on the press: *Direzione Generale per la Stampa Italiana* and *Direzione Generale per la Stampa Estera*. The first had four *divisioni* – *Affari Generali*, *Stampa quotidiana e periodica*, *Libri*, and *Propaganda interna* – and controlled all kinds of press printed and distributed within Italy. It is worth highlighting how the main sections controlling periodical press were under the division of *Propaganda interna*, which comprised of:

- Propaganda a mezzo della stampa
- Stampa periodica, letteraria, artistica e sportiva
- Stampa periodica per ragazzi
- Stampa periodica illustrate e umoristica
- Giornalismo radiofonico
- Stampa cinematografica.⁴⁵

Merely by examining the structure of the Minculpop, it can be noted how the press was – still – considered as a means of propaganda. Furthermore, its extended organisation reflected the increasing importance of the institution: it had one division more than its predecessor, and its functionaries grew from 183 to 800.⁴⁶

In spite of the change of the name of the ministry reflecting the idea of elevating the masses through a Fascist culture promoted by the regime, in practice the Minculpop bureaucratised all aspects of cultural production and dissemination. As a result, Mussolini's idea of the press as a means through which to educate and control the masses was applied to other sectors such as radio, cinema, theatre, and tourism. The fact that the structure of the Minculpop put under the propaganda division all aspects concerning the press, demonstrates how *cultura popolare* was meant to control and influence the public opinion, that is to say a new form of

⁴⁴ Ottavio Dinale, 'Cultura Popolare', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 30 May 1937, quoted in Cannistraro, 'Burocrazia e politica culturale nello stato fascista', p.186.

⁴⁵ 'Il Ministero della Cultura Popolare e il suo ordinamento', *Annuario della stampa italiana*, 20.1 (1939), 6.

⁴⁶ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 133.

propaganda.⁴⁷ As far as the daily press was concerned, this resulted in a uniformity of information, guided and based on the *veline* distributed by the Minculpop and the *Agenzia Stefani*. Through this well-structured apparatus, the Fascist regime in the 1930s was committed to carry out a process of what Tranfaglia calls, in one of the key studies on the Fascist *veline*:

[l']annullamento dell'opinione pubblica democraticamente intesa e della sostituzione a essa [...] [di] un processo di costruzione dall'alto di immagini, posizioni, idee tali da accreditare gli obiettivi di dominio del fascismo inteso come ideologia e regime strettamente legato al suo fondatore e protagonista, Benito Mussolini.⁴⁸

As for the periodical press, despite the regime's extensive control, it had more freedom than the daily press. This can be explained by the fact that periodicals were not as widely distributed and read as newspapers, they were not used as source of *information* and, more importantly, they were – generally – not aimed at the masses but targeted a specific sector of readership. In a moment in which the Fascist regime was aiming to reach the masses, periodicals were not the main target of the regime's control, as they were leisure items and generally not affordable for the lower classes, therefore characterised by limited circulation.

However, in the 1930s the illustrated press was revolutionised by the use of the rotogravure, which allowed the printing of more copies at a lower cost, and the reproduction of higher quality images compared to traditional printing. The new product that resulted from this technique – the *rotocalco* – made possible a wider dissemination and expanded readership for magazines, making them available and appealing for readers from different classes and education, as analysed below. In a report by the *Direzione Generale Stampa Italiana*, it emerges clearly how in 1937 illustrated press was kept under control by the Minculpop, which was sending instructions to editors in chief of illustrated magazines on the topics their publications should cover: 'vita della famiglia, maternità, economia domestica, partecipazione alla vita fascista, allo sport, alla assistenza, ed in generale a tutto ciò che si intona con la nuova coscienza fascista'.⁴⁹ The bureaucratic apparatus of the Minculpop was thus controlling every field of the

⁴⁷ Already in 1935 Mussolini had expressed the idea of culture as a means of propaganda when, speaking of the role of the *Istituto LUCE*, he stated that cinematographic production should become a 'mezzo efficace di elevazione culturale, etica ed estetica del popolo, come ancora di propaganda in funzione dei fini propri dello Stato'. Mussolini, 'Riunione del Consiglio dei Ministri', 15 January 1935, *Opera Omnia*, XXVII, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Tranfaglia, *La stampa del regime*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ 'Relazione riassuntiva sulla attività svolta dalla Direzione Generale per la Stampa Italiana nel mese di dicembre 1937-XVI', in ACS, MCP, b. 28, f. 424. One month earlier, the Minculpop intervened to 'imprimere alla stampa

press and cultural production – a control which included the content and programmes of popular *rotocalchi*, as the three case studies of this thesis will each demonstrate in their particular sector.

The Minculpop led by Alfieri also had a central role in the Fascist regime's project of spiritually elevating the masses through the dissemination of a Fascist culture. Fascist cultural policies reflected the significant role the masses had in the regime's ideology, and its aim to form the *uomo nuovo*, a Fascist citizen who had internalised and acted according to Fascist morality, existing less as an individual than as a corporate element of the Fascist 'popolo'. To mould the new Italian, the Fascist regime intended to create a new culture for the masses, a *cultura popolare* which reflected the modernity of the Fascist regime and the increasingly important role of mass media.⁵⁰ Therefore, the development and spread of *cultura popolare* was declared to be the main aim of the Minculpop, and a crucial part of the process of changing the habits of Italian people, as 'la rivoluzione [...] dal punto di vista del costume, del carattere, delle distanze sociali [era] appena cominciata'.⁵¹ In this project of cultural revolution, the masses had a key role – hence the need of a *popular* culture and a ministry which represented the

elemento propulsore di attività che interessano da vicino i *più vasti strati sociali* e che *non possono in tempo fascista essere privilegio di pochi* [...] il rinnovamento operato dal Fascismo [...] rende sempre più necessario il *contatto fra la cultura e le masse*.⁵²

In other words, if in the 1920s the Fascist regime was focused on controlling and rendering the press Fascist, in the 1930s, after gaining control over and developing the means of communication, Mussolini concentrated on creating a Fascist culture which could mould the *uomo nuovo* and created in the Minculpop his operating arm. However, although the actions of the Minculpop were theoretically aimed at both stimulating and disciplining cultural production, in practice the ministry only extended the regime's totalitarian control over culture by exercising its power of censorship. In 1937, Alfieri outlined the actions the Minculpop should undertake to

settimanale illustrata un carattere diverso da quello attuale, che è basato tutto su un tono equivoco e malsano assolutamente contrario allo spirito con cui il Regime intende educare la gioventù italiana', in 'Relazione riassuntiva sulla attività svolta dalla Direzione Generale per la Stampa Italiana nel mese di novembre 1937-XVI', Spulcioni, *L'organizzazione del consenso*, p. 330. On the discrepancy between the Fascist regime's education of Italian children and the model offered by comic magazines, see chapter 2.

⁵⁰ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 131. According to a definition by Giovanni Gentile, 'cultura popolare sarà la cultura che si promuove attraverso la stampa, il teatro, la radio, il cinematografo e lo stesso Turismo, in quanto attività sociali disciplinate e controllate dallo Stato', quoted in Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio*, p. 101.

⁵¹ Mussolini 'Alla vecchia guardia', 26 March 1939, *Opera Omnia*, XXIX, p. 250.

⁵² *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 27 May 1937, quoted in Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 131 (emphasis mine).

put into effect the Fascist cultural project: the expansion of the jurisdiction of the ministry, and the creation of a popular culture which would stimulate the participation of the masses in the nation's cultural life.

The five categories of state intervention described by Gundle and Forgacs – subvention and premiums; protectionism; promotion of export; propaganda; and censorship – coincide with the policy of intervention in culture of the Minculpop.⁵³ Through circulars indicating what topics should be covered, and the writing style which should be adopted, the Minculpop – and the *Agenzia Stefani* – intervened in the press field and conditioned the content of publications. However, direct instructions on what to write were not the only way the Minculpop intervened in the press field. The ministry launched a series of campaigns to mould the Fascist *uomo nuovo*: against the pre-Fascist liberal Italian culture; against dialects; praising Mussolini and depicting him as the archetype of the new man; in exaltation of *romanità* and the myth of the Italian race; against bourgeois habits; and, finally, against Jews. These campaigns heavily influenced cultural production and, in particular, the content of magazines. To give some examples from our case studies, the campaign against local dialects, carried out to unify the language and give the people a strong national identity and consciousness through their everyday speech, was reflected in *Grazia* in its column ‘Voi non dovete dire’ (1938–1940), which listed foreign words of common usage highlighting their limited meaning and urging the readers to use the more precise Italian equivalent instead.⁵⁴ In 1938, as analysed in the next chapter, the publisher Nerbini declared ‘giornali italiani ai lettori italiani’, completely changed the content of *L'Avventuroso* to reflect the Minculpop campaign against foreign influence, and published new columns glorifying the Italian imperial past, disseminating to its young readers the myth of *romanità*;⁵⁵ finally, *Omnibus*, through pictures and articles, spread the idea of America as a violent civilisation – although at the same time it imitated and praised American models, as we will see in chapter 3.⁵⁶

⁵³ Forgacs, Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, pp. 203 – 218. On Fascist censorship see Guido Bonsaver, *Mussolini censore* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2013); Maurizio Cesari, *La censura nel periodo fascista* (Naples: Liguori, 1978); *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy*; Fabre, *L'elenco*; Talbot, *Censorship in Fascist Italy*.

⁵⁴ For example, in the first issue readers were advised not to use the word ‘chignon’: ‘[Se] questa deliziosa acconciatura è dura a morire, altrettanto dura a morire ne è il nome – *chignon* – non molto italiano, in verità [...] Si dirà pertanto: “Ella portava i capelli acconciati in un graziosissimo nodo a sommo della nuca”’, ‘Voi non dovete dire’, *Grazia*, 10 November 1938, p. 3. See chapter 4.

⁵⁵ L'Editore, ‘Ai lettori’, *L'Avventuroso*, 20 November 1938, p. 2. See chapter 2.

⁵⁶ See for example Alberto Moravia, ‘Le americane’, *Omnibus*, 28 August 1937, p. 1; ‘Documenti americani’, *Omnibus*, 15 January 1938, p. 6.

By reflecting Minculpop's policies and dispositions, these popular magazines were effectively educating their readers in Fascist values, and therefore offer a clear example of the influence and control of the Fascist regime over popular press, although as we will see throughout this thesis, Fascist ideology was far from the only force that conditioned and shaped these magazines. In particular, the control of the Minculpop over the illustrated press became more rigid at the end of 1937, when Alfieri targeted entertainment publications such as women's magazines, recommending publishers to focus on topics such as maternity, domestic economy, and family life, that is to say themes consistent with Fascist precepts – and the content of *Grazia* clearly demonstrates the penetration of Fascist rhetoric in this sector. One year later, at the end of 1938, it was the turn of children's magazines, which were victims of a renewed campaign for cultural 'autarchy'. On this occasion, the Minculpop urged all publishers to eliminate foreign material from their magazines and to exalt the Italian tradition instead.⁵⁷ Moreover, publishers and printers were required to send to the Ministry a list of their publications, which Alfieri double-checked against the lists of the prefects, tightening the control over periodical press, and the effects of this can be clearly seen in the sequence of events that brought to the forced closure of *Omnibus* in January 1939.⁵⁸

However, although the aim of the Minculpop was to supervise all cultural production and stimulated the dissemination of Fascist culture, in practice, as Gundle and Forgacs point out, there were other forces in action which limited the influence of the Minculpop. Other state-forces such as the Foreign and the Interior Ministry, the local power of the prefects, and personal antagonisms and interests limited Alfieri's ambitious plan of controlling the emerging mass culture. More importantly, other factors such as cultural economy and the audience's taste influenced and contributed to the shaping of Italian modern mass culture.⁵⁹ These factors have to be taken into account especially when analysing a popular product such as *rotocalchi*, as they were a product aimed at selling as many copies as possible and targeted a mass public; as such, they had to reflect as well as shape their taste. As a commercial product, magazines reflected both the popular demand for specific products, and the restrictions of the Fascist censorship. The three case studies in this thesis, *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus* and *Grazia*, all demonstrate the

⁵⁷ See chapter 2.

⁵⁸ Talbot, *Censorship in Fascist Italy*, pp. 143 - 144. See chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Forgacs, Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, pp. 197 – 203.

complexity of a popular culture shaped by different factors under a totalitarian regime. The short journey of *Omnibus* is a clear example of the difficulty in getting authorisation for new periodicals, and of the personal and political plots behind the scenes that censored and closed the magazine, whose irony and strong presence of foreign models were hardly tolerated by the Fascist regime. *L'Avventuroso* demonstrates both state intervention and the influence of American models in shaping a popular product that targeted a young readership; and, finally, *Grazia* demonstrates the complexity of the role of women within the Fascist regime, targeting women as modern consumers, presenting lifestyles characterised by fashionable clothes and sport activities, but counterbalancing this image with articles suggesting the Fascist ideal roles of mother and wife. These magazines all demonstrate the complexity of Italian popular culture and of the industry and society that produced it, which in the second half of the 1930s was moving towards a modern society, informed by consumerism, foreign models, and new lifestyle ambitions. All these aspects were reflected in the *rotocalchi*, whose origins and main actors are examined in the following section.

2. The popular illustrated press and the *rotocalchi* revolution

In order to understand the importance of the innovation introduced by the *rotocalchi*, and its impact on the Italian magazine sector and its readership, it is necessary to take a step back and briefly outline the main stages in the history of illustrated periodicals in Italy. At the end of the nineteenth century, significant technological advancement in the press industry marked the beginning of a process of modernisation of the publishing sector, which particularly affected periodicals. This process was propelled further by innovative printing techniques that were introduced into Italy in the second half of the 1920s, and which characterised magazine production in the 1930s. This introduction to the field is also useful in order to highlight the changes in the publishing sector that made companies such as Nerbini, Mondadori, and Rizzoli key players in the modernisation of Italian popular magazines in the 1930s.

In 1846, the first illustrated magazine appeared in Italy: *Mondo illustrato* (Turin: Pomba, 1847 – 1848). The idea of the publisher, Pomba, was to create a national illustrated periodical capable of competing with the European illustrated journals:

Per una singolare fatalità il paese che fu la culla delle belle arti [...] si è lasciata precedere nei giornali illustrati dall'Inghilterra, dalla Francia e dalla Germania. [...] il *Mondo illustrato* è opera civile, italiana e artistica nel tempo stesso [...] È un pensiero patrio [...] e saremo lietissimi di mostrare al resto d'Europa, che l'Italia è capace di fare un *giornale illustrato* [...].⁶⁰

Whereas elsewhere in Europe illustrated periodicals were already circulating from the 1840s,⁶¹ in Italy this was still an unexplored field soon to be modernised by publishing companies such as Treves (Milan) and Sonzogno (Milan). It was in 1875 with the launch of *Illustrazione italiana* (Milan: Treves, 1875 – 1962) that illustrated periodicals began to be popular throughout Italy.⁶² After Treves's successful attempt, other publishers launched their own illustrated journals, such as *Il Secolo illustrato* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1889 – 1927), *La Tribuna illustrata* (Rome: Bontempelli, 1890 – 1969) and *La Domenica del Corriere* (Milan: Corriere della Sera, 1899 – 1989). These periodicals had many features in common: they covered various topics, from sport and fashion to literature, arts and science, with a particular focus on current events, from both Italy and the rest of the world. Not only did these magazines offer news, but, more importantly, they offered *entertainment*. The illustrations, the main feature and novelty of these journals, were rich artworks or reproductions of paintings and photographs, and were mainly printed in black and white, with only the front page using colour.

Treves and Sonzogno, both based in Milan, dominated the Italian publishing scene at the end of the nineteenth century, the first focussing on high culture and targeting an educated bourgeoisie audience, the second aiming to attract the petite bourgeoisie and the emerging urban working class with products specifically aimed at them, such as illustrated journals, women's periodicals and popular romance. In spite of this distinction, Treves and Sonzogno competed with each other in the periodical sector, which mainly targeted a broad readership and aimed for

⁶⁰ *Il Mondo Illustrato*, 2 January 1847, pp. 3-4.

⁶¹ Key publications include: *Illustrated London News* (London: William Little, 1842 – 2003); *L'Illustration: Journal Universel* (Paris: [n. publ.], 1844 – 1944); *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig: Weber, 1843 – 1944).

⁶² Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, 'Stampa, editori e capitale nell'Italia postunitaria', *Studi Storici*, 25.1 (1984), 261-272 (p. 270). The circulation of any publication was limited by the high rate of illiteracy, which in 1871 was 68,8%. See Istituto centrale di statistica, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia 1861 – 1975* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1976), p. 14. For a history of the periodical press in Italy in the 19th and 20th century, see Mario Lombardo, Fabrizio Pignatelli, *La stampa periodica in Italia. Mezzo secolo di riviste illustrate* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), particularly pp. 19-37 for the nineteenth century.

a widespread distribution at different levels of society.⁶³ The new technologies for the reproduction of images were crucial: images were a powerful means to quickly and directly deliver and support the news, contributing to the expansion of the readership and the beginning of the transformation of the press into a mass product.⁶⁴ The process of technological innovation in image printing began in the 1850s, when the photogravure was introduced, and progressively replaced lithography, a printing method used since the end of the eighteenth century.

Technological advancement brought the development, in the 1890s, of the rotogravure, which allowed high-volume printing of standardised products, making it a cost-effective technique for printing mass-circulation magazines.⁶⁵ The importance of this new technology lay particularly in its high-quality reproduction of images – and its printing speed –, which attracted readers and, consequently, advertisers, turning periodicals into commercial products.⁶⁶ As discussed below, due to the popularity of cinema, the public got more used to watching than to reading, a change in habits reflected in magazines by the extensive use of photographs and innovative layouts that allowed the reader to ‘watch’ the magazine, therefore allowing the development of modern mass magazines in the interwar years.

In this phase, the evolution of Italian illustrated periodicals is closely connected to the development of periodical press in Europe as well as in the United States, as discussed further in section 2.2, and section 3 below.

2.1 The evolution of the mass press in Europe: illustrated weeklies in the interwar years

The preface to the first number of *Mondo illustrato* reveals how Italy’s illustrated press was one step behind other European countries, where illustrated periodicals began flourishing from the second half of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these countries

⁶³ Ada Gigli Marchetti, ‘Le nuove dimensioni dell’impresa editoriale’, in *Storia dell’editoria nell’Italia contemporanea*, ed. by Gabriele Turi (Florence: Giunti, 1997), pp. 125–131. Regarding popular periodicals, it is worth mentioning Treves’s *Illustrazione popolare* (1869 –), a publication specifically aimed at a less-educated readership as demonstrated by the style of the articles, written with an educational tone. See Lombardo, Pignatelli, *La stampa periodica in Italia*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ On the development of illustrations in the nineteenth century see Paola Pallottino, *Storia dell’illustrazione italiana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1988), particularly ‘Fotografia contro pittura’, pp. 137–162 and ‘Il mondo a dispense’, pp. 179–192.

⁶⁵ On the gravure printing techniques see *The Atlas of Analytical Signatures of Photographic Processes*, ed. by Dusan C. Stulik and Art Kaplan (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2013), pp. 4–6.

⁶⁶ Lombardo, Pignatelli, *La stampa periodica in Italia*, p. 39.

were still ahead of Italy in terms of magazine production and set examples that conditioned the shaping of modern Italian illustrated magazines. In particular, magazines that developed in Germany and France in the 1920s had a great influence on the layout and editorial formulas of 1930s Italian *rotocalchi*. Following on from the example set by nineteenth century illustrated periodicals, modern illustrated magazines were characterised by an extensive use of pictures, and in the 1920s, similarly to the role of illustrations at the end of the nineteenth century, photographs established themselves as a privileged means of information and storytelling accessible to the emerging masses. Moreover, in the 1920s readers had become used to visual images thanks to the popularity of films, which turned readers into spectators and, subsequently, magazines into a visual product.⁶⁷ In that decade, the increasing use of photography led to the development of a new form of journalism: photojournalism.⁶⁸

Photojournalism as a means to deliver the news in magazines developed in Germany, where illustrated magazines such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1892–1945), *Uhu* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1924–1934), and *Das Magazin* (Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient GmbH, then Berlin: Dr. Eysler & Co. Verlag GmbH, 1924–1941) achieved great popularity. As Kurt Korff, director of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (BIZ) – a pioneering picture magazine – put it:

Life has become more hectic and the individual has become less prepared to peruse a newspaper in leisurely reflection. Accordingly, it has become necessary to find a keener and more succinct form of pictorial representation that has an effect on readers even if they just skim through the pages. The public has become more and more used to *taking in world events through pictures rather than words*.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The evolution of illustrated magazines has many features in common and it is strictly connected with the popularity of films. On the topic, see Francesco Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento. Cinema, esperienza, modernità* (Milan: Bompiani, 2005); Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002); László Moholy-Nagy, *Pittura Fotografia Film*, ed. by Antonello Negri (Milan: Scalpendi, 2008).

⁶⁸ '[A]lthough the term was coined in response to the development of picture magazines established during the 1920s and 1930s, the concept of photojournalism has actually been used to showcase a variety of photographic practices that began in the 1830s', *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, ed. by Stuart Allan (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 73. On the transformation of periodical press in Europe between 1880 and 1920, see Evaghélia Stead, Hélène Védrine, *L'Europe des revues (1880 – 1920): estampes, photographies, illustrations* (Paris: Press de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008).

⁶⁹ Quoted in Department of Photographs, 'Photojournalism and the Picture Press in Germany', in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phpp/hd_phpp.htm [Accessed 20 May 2017] (emphasis mine).

Photojournalism was thus a consequence of modern life and technological innovations, such as the introduction of the portable Leica camera that allowed photographers to take photos of subjects in motion.⁷⁰ Moreover, the introduction of rotary presses, the superseding of the halftone printing, and the establishment of the rotogravure printing technique brought a step forward in technological innovation and the process of the expansion of the readership that had begun in the nineteenth century.

In the 1920s, Weimar Germany's magazines were among the first to introduce the use of images as visual representation of events, as single images or in photo series. In those years, new uses of photos as a means of communication also emerged, such as photo-essays and photomontages, used to express the contradictions and social crises of modern life.⁷¹ Not only did these magazines focus on images, but they were also put together to recall the dynamism of films, highlighting the connection with this media and creating a distinctive feature of illustrated magazine worldwide. *BIZ*, in particular, was the first to rely entirely on photographs, a feature that made the magazine a national success with a circulation record of 2 million copies in 1931, making it 'the largest mass circulation magazine' in Germany.⁷² It covered a large variety of topics, mainly concerning sports, the arts, and technology, and although the use of the text was limited as a support to images, it also included serialised novels. This successful formula was later emulated by other European magazines, such as the French *L'Illustration*, *Vu* (Paris: [n. publ.], 1928–1940), and *Marianne* (Paris: [n. publ.], 1932–1940). Although *L'Illustration* was historically the first successful illustrated French journal, it was the modern-looking *Vu* that revolutionised French picture magazines. Created using the model set by *BIZ*, *Vu* aimed to cover a wide range of topics to keep up with 'the fast rhythm of modern life', as stated in the launch issue.⁷³ Like its German equivalent, *Vu* used photos to inform and illustrate the news, making images its key feature and, thanks to the rotogravure, distanced itself from *L'Illustration*, which was still printed using halftones. With a modern layout, extensive use of pictures, and a wide

⁷⁰ 'Photojournalism', in *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, ed. by Lynne Warren, 3 vols (New York: Routledge, 2006), I, pp. 717–718.

⁷¹ Hanno Hardt, 'Pictures for the Masses: Photography and the Rise of Popular Magazines in Weimar Germany', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 13.1 (1989), 7–29 (pp. 7–9).

⁷² Ibid., p. 14. On the German periodical press and photojournalism see Karl Christian Fuhrer, Corey Ross, *Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009); Daniel H. Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis. The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012).

⁷³ Quoted in Penelope Rook, 'Fashion Photography and Photojournalism: Posing the Body in *Vu*', *Fashion Theory*, 21.2 (2017), 131–56 (p. 134).

range of topics covered, from fashion to politics, *Vu* targeted a broad range of readers and became the most successful mass-circulation French magazine of the time. It is worth highlighting how *Vu* combined serious political analyses with lighter topics – like popular fashion and beauty tips – and published photos by the most famous photographers of the time, such as Robert Capa, whose famous shot of a falling soldier during the Spanish Civil War was published for the first time in *Vu*.⁷⁴

Similar to the German and the French illustrated magazines, the British *Weekly Illustrated* (London: Oldhams, 1934–1939), and *Picture Post* (London: Hulton Press, 1938–1956) both focused entirely on photographs and copied the *BIZ* formula. In both cases, Stefan Lorant, who had been the chief editor of another pioneering German illustrated magazine, the main competitor to *BIZ*, the *Munchner Illustrierte Presse* (Munich: Knorr & Hirth, 1924–1944), edited the magazine, bringing into the British periodical press the features of German illustrated magazines. Lorant also had a role in the creation of *Life*; he had met Henry Luce in 1934 when Luce was planning the publication of an American illustrated magazine on the model set by *BIZ* and *Weekly Illustrated*. When the first issue of *Life* (Chicago: Time Inc., 1936 – 1972) was launched, in November 1936, its layout resembled that of *Weekly Illustrated*. At the same time, when *Picture Post* was first published in 1938, it had many similarities with *Life*, demonstrating how in the 1930s European and American illustrated magazines influenced each other, creating similar layouts and formulas that can be found in various magazines, including Italian *rotocalchi*.⁷⁵ These magazines also often had in common the crucial role played by their lead editors: Kurt Korff (*BIZ*), Lucien Vogel (*Vu*), Stefan Lorant (*Picture Post*), Henry Luce (*Life*) and, in the case of Italy, Leo Longanesi (*Omnibus*). Each was the mind behind their magazines, shaping and giving them their distinctive features.

This brief overview of European illustrated magazines in the 1920s highlights how German, French, British, and Italian picture magazines had many features in common, showing reciprocal influences that, as we shall see, were still visible in Italian magazines of the 1930s.

⁷⁴ Danielle Leenaerts, *Petite histoire du magazine Vu (1928-1940)* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 25-27, and p. 355. On *Vu* see also Michel Frizot, Cédric de Veigy, *Vu: The Story of a Magazine that Made an Era* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009). On the French popular press see Rosemary Chapman, Nicholas Hewitt, *Popular Culture and Mass Communication in Twentieth-century France* (New York: Mellen, 1992).

⁷⁵ Michael Hallett, *Stefan Lorant. Godfather of Photojournalism* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), pp. 51-53 and pp. 69-76. On the British periodical press see Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Matthew Engel, *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (London: Indigo, 1997).

These models were introduced to Italy thanks to the initiative of a few publishers, whose work had a key role in the developing of the modern Italian periodical press, as discussed in the following section.

2.2 Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Nerbini

The rotogravure printing revolutionised the Italian periodical press from the second half of the 1920s, following on from the establishment of picture magazines in Europe. Like at the end of the nineteenth century, Milan played a prominent role once more. In 1924, the publisher Angelo Rizzoli – who had founded his own publishing company in Milan in 1909 – bought a rotogravure printing machine, the first to be introduced in Italy, while in 1925 Arnoldo Mondadori – whose publishing company had been founded in 1907 – launched the first weekly printed with the rotogravure, *Il Secolo illustrato*. The next turning-point came in the year 1927, when due to financial difficulties, Mondadori sold his illustrated periodicals to Rizzoli – *Secolo illustrato*, *Comoedia* and *Novella* (1919), and *La Donna* (1922) –, who turned them into modern illustrated magazines as discussed below.

Novella offers a clear example of how Rizzoli conceived modern periodicals. When it was launched by Casa Editrice Italia (Milan), *Novella* was ‘una raccolta [...] di buona prosa narrativa italiana’, and explicitly claimed not be a ‘magazine’ – ‘quel tipico zibaldone giornalistico-letterario-fotografico che va sotto il nome di rivista’.⁷⁶ In 1921, Mondadori acquired the fortnightly and introduced artworks and photographs related to the short stories published. Although the *novelle* remained the focus of the magazine and were still written by prominent Italian writers such as Gabriele D’Annunzio, Massimo Bontempelli, and Luigi Pirandello, Mondadori gave more space and relevance to images. When Rizzoli finally bought the periodical and turned it into a weekly, printed with the rotogravure, illustrations became a key feature, and writers’ *novelle* were substituted by popular romances written by authors such as Luciana Peverelli, Mura, and Milly Dandolo. More importantly, *Novella* started publishing photos of famous actors and actresses: ‘bastava pubblicare la faccia di una certa diva che *Novella* saliva. Era una delle chiavi di successo dei rotocalchi di Rizzoli’, recalled Zavattini, who

⁷⁶ *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili lombardi*, ed. by Rita Carrarini and Michele Giordano (Milan: Bibliografica, 1993), p. 276. This definition also reveals the prejudice surrounding popular magazines, whose focus was not only on the content of the text but also, and perhaps mainly, on illustrations.

contributed to the magazine.⁷⁷ Moreover, *Novella* also included a correspondence column, which became a model for future women's magazines. The new layout and popular content of *Novella* made it a successful magazine with 150.000 copies sold weekly, turning Rizzoli into a competitive publisher and one of the protagonists of the *rotocalchi* revolution.⁷⁸

Milan was not the only city in which new publishing companies flourished. In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, many publishers established themselves as protagonists of the publishing field, such as Zanichelli (Bologna, 1859), Bemporad (Florence, 1889), and Laterza (Bari, 1901). Although Mondadori and Rizzoli are undoubtedly the main protagonists of the popular press revolution of the 1930s, another publisher emerged in those years as a prominent figure: Giuseppe Nerbini, who founded his publishing company between 1895 and 1898 in Florence.⁷⁹ Florence was already an important centre of cultural production, with active publishers already established such as Le Monnier (1837), Paggi (1841), Salani (1862), and Sansoni (1873). However, Nerbini established himself as a publisher of popular products from the beginning, targeting a heterogeneous and wide readership. As a socialist, he started printing political texts and literature inspired by or connected to his political beliefs, disseminating the work of authors such as Proudhon, Tolstoy, Zola, and De Amicis. However, Nerbini also published entertainment novels, that is to say literature aimed at the emerging subaltern reading classes. In particular, between 1914 and 1918 Nerbini put his efforts in expanding his readership, publishing American *dime novels* such as *Nick Carter* – from which he derived an Italianised version, *Nick Porter*, in 1923 – the western series par excellence, *Buffalo Bill*, and the mysterious *Lord Lister* in 1922, to only mention a few. In other words, from the beginning of his publishing career Nerbini concentrated on commercial products, publishing *romanzi popolari* – mainly French, Russian and, from 1914, American – targeting a less-

⁷⁷ Cesare Zavattini, *Io: un'autobiografia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), p. 68; see also Franco Bechis, Sergio Rizzo, *In nome della rosa* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1991), pp. 31-33.

⁷⁸ Mazzuca, *La erre verde*, p. 35; Nicola Tranfaglia, Albertina Vittoria, *Storia degli editori italiani* (Rome: Laterza, 2000), p. 319. See also Forgacs, Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, pp. 98-102.

⁷⁹ Due to the lack of documentation, an exact date cannot be given. Gianfranco Tortorelli, the most authoritative biographer of Giuseppe Nerbini and his publishing company, highlights how different studies on Nerbini give different dates of foundation: Mario Bonetti in *Storia dell'editoria italiana* (Rome: Gazzetta del Libro, 1960) sustains that the publishing company was founded in 1898, while Romolo Baccani in his introduction to the reprintings of *L'Avventuroso*, 'La casa editrice Nerbini dal 1897 ad oggi', *L'Avventuroso* 22 vols, (Florence: Nerbini, 1973-79), I, p. i, states that 1897 was the year of foundation. Although a journal article mentions a socialist leaflet published by Nerbini in 1895, and another legal document mentions 1899, Tortorelli sustains 1897 as the most likely date of the beginning of the activity of Nerbini as a publisher. *Le edizioni Nerbini (1897-1921)*, ed. by Gianfranco Tortorelli (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1983), pp. 2-3.

educated readership.⁸⁰ In particular, Nerbini's *dispense* combined images and writing, and the use of illustrations was a crucial element for the expansion of the readership, laying the basis for the development of modern mass print culture.⁸¹ Nonetheless, perhaps the most important innovation introduced by Nerbini were American adventure comics, which revolutionised both children's magazines and Italian comics, as fully analysed in chapter 2 below through the example of *L'Avventuroso*.

As discussed in section 3 of this chapter, the editorial staff behind each magazine was quite small; as Rizzoli recalled in 1970, there were 'un paio di direttori che facevano tutto con un piccolissimo gruppo di persone. Erano tempi in cui io conoscevo nome, cognome, famiglia di ognuno dei miei dipendenti'.⁸²

Mario Nerbini, who took over from his father in 1934, not only used to supervise every aspect of his comic magazines before authorising printing, but also used to rely on regular collaborators who worked behind the scenes on several different publications, such as Emilio Fancelli (author of adventure novels, writer of Buffalo Bill adventure stories and comic storywriter), Paolo Lorenzini (head editor and storywriter for *Topolino* and *L'Avventuroso*), Giove Toppi and Tancredi Scarpelli (illustrators of covers, comic strips and stories). Similarly, Mondadori and Rizzoli had regular collaborators, some of whom worked for both companies, as in the case of Cesare Zavattini and Giorgio Scerbanenco. Scerbanenco, for example, worked for Mondadori's *Grazia* from 1938 using the pseudonym 'Luciano', but had already published articles and serialised novels in Rizzoli's *Lei*, *Novella*, *Cinema Illustrazione*, and even in children's periodical *Novellino*; after 1945, he kept regular columns on Rizzoli's *Annabella* ('La posta di Adrian', whose responses were collected in the book *Voci di Adrian* in 1969), and *Bella* ('La posta di Valentino'). Zavattini offers another instructive example: in 1930 he worked for Rizzoli, writing in *Cinema Illustrazione*, *Novella*, *La Donna*, and *Il Secolo Illustrato*, for Bompiani's *Almanacco letterario* (1931, 1932, 1933, 1934 and 1935), and was finally hired by Mondadori in 1936 as magazines' editor in chief and writer of Italian Walt Disney stories. In 1937, Zavattini became director of *Le Grandi Firme*, a fortnightly publication published by Vitagliano, and revolutionised its layout to adapt it the readers' demands:

⁸⁰ Pier Francesco Listri, *Il mondo di Nerbini* (Florence: Nerbini, 1993), pp. 113-123.

⁸¹ Ibid. pp.44-46; *Le edizioni Nerbini*, pp. 1-66. On the history of Nerbini and Italian comics see also Maurizio Sessa, *La bottega delle nuvole* (Florence: Medicea, 1995).

⁸² *L'Europeo*, 26 March 1970, quoted in Mazzuca, *La erre verde*, p. 36. See pp. 48-58 on Rizzoli's employees.

Oggi il pubblico non si accontenta di leggere. Vuole la fotografia. *Lo stadio e il cine gli hanno insegnato a vedere*. Fra le colonne di composizione tipografica e di fantasia pura, vuole qualche fotografia, ossia qualche finestra affacciata sulla vita e sulla realtà.⁸³

As stated by Longanesi in 1937, Italian readers wanted photographs, confirming the idea of modern popular magazines as a film on paper, that is to say dynamic.⁸⁴ Therefore, in order to keep up with the times and to sell, publishers had to adapt to the new readers' taste and modernise their periodicals. Furthermore, the presence of foreign culture and the adoption of a visual layout emerge as an established model which deeply affected modern magazines. Ten years after Rizzoli began his activity as a popular magazine publisher, the format transformed into *rotocalchi*, a genre defined by the use of well-printed images which accompanied the text and caught the reader's eye, made cheap by the use of the rotogravure printing.

In the next section, the new resulting relationship between the publishing companies and the Fascist regime is outlined.

2.3 Printing *rotocalchi* under the Fascist regime

The analysis of the development of popular magazines in the 1930s offers an interesting view on the dynamics between the Fascist regime and the publishing sector. In particular, it reveals a certain complexity in which political faiths and practical business aspects merge and fade, sometimes overlapping. Although it would be tempting to divide publishers between Fascists and anti-Fascists, a clear line cannot be drawn and, although throughout those years, politics and ideology were a pervading aspect of public life, the cultural production of publishers such as Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Nerbini seem to have followed business needs more prominently than political beliefs. In the sector of magazine publishing, the actions of these publishers reflected the changes in publishing happening throughout Europe and the United States, where mass

⁸³ *Le Grandi Firme*, 22 April 1937, quoted in *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*, p. 182 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁴ Illustrated magazines of the 1930s contained many references to cinema, from the focus on film stars to the use of photomontage. Recent works on the topic include: Anna Cellinese, 'Le riviste fotografiche: "Life", "Look" e l'importazione di uno stile americano', in *Italiamerica. L'editoria*, ed. by Emanuela Scarpellini and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), pp. 125-155; and Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta. Romanzi, fotoromanzi, rotocalchi cinematografici* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000).

illustrated magazines began to appear and develop particularly from the 1920s, as much as they did the imperatives of the regime. Nonetheless, as already discussed, the Fascist regime exerted a widespread control over the press, affecting magazines' production and content; more importantly, it represented a crucial interlocutor for all publishers. This section briefly analyses the relationship of Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Nerbini with the Fascist regime, highlighting how the development of popular magazines benefited from a certain freedom until about 1938 – a date that suggests the connection between censorship and the increasing convergence between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany – and revealing how each publisher had their privileged communication channels with prominent Fascist officials.

Angelo Rizzoli, who never joined the Fascist party nor tolerated the adherence of his employees to the Fascist *sindacato dei giornalisti*, was not hindered by the Fascist regime from publishing any periodical, whose long list included the satirical *Bertoldo* (1936 – 1943), film magazine *Cinema Illustrazione* (1926 – 1939), *Omnibus* (1937 – 1939), women's magazine *Lei* (1933 –, *Annabella* from 1938), the short-lived *Tutto* (1939) – which substituted *Omnibus* in content and layout – and *Oggi* (1939 –). Apart from *Omnibus*' ambivalent attitude towards the regime, discussed in chapter 3, it is worth highlighting that *Lei* was a challenging magazine too, due to its inclusion of photographs portraying women – mostly foreign – performing unusual tasks, far from the Fascist curvaceous housewife idealised by the regime. Photos of airwomen, tennis players, golf champions, and Amazons were displayed from the cover of *Lei*, suggesting a different ideal of womanhood.⁸⁵ In 1932, a policeman noted down the testimony of an informer who stated that 'quella di Rizzoli è la tipografia dell'antifascismo [...] da dove escono periodicamente stampe antifasciste'.⁸⁶ However, Rizzoli collaborated with Mussolini's son Vittorio, who became editor-in-chief of *Cinema* in October 1938, and never had a problem with Fascist censorship, at least until he was forced to change the title of *Lei* to *Annabella* (1938), *Omnibus* was forcibly closed in 1939, and its substitute *Tutto* accused of ignoring censorship.⁸⁷ It was only in 1940 that Rizzoli was investigated by the *polizia politica*, and although there are insufficient reports held in the Italian National Archive to be certain, it seems that he was never officially accused of being an anti-Fascist. Rizzoli's position within the regime seems to have

⁸⁵ Mazzuca, *La erre verde*, p. 58.

⁸⁶ Bechis, Rizzo, *In nome della rosa*, p. 47.

⁸⁷ All these aspects are further explored in chapters 3 and 4.

been functional to his company's fortune, as he formally abandoned his socialist beliefs and supported the Fascist regime to increase his business: 'pur dando lavoro a parecchi perseguitati del regime e dicendo peste e corna del fascismo, in pubblico Rizzoli continua[va] a frequentare i gerarchi'.⁸⁸

By contrast, both Mondadori and Nerbini actively supported the Fascist regime, Mondadori, for example, by publishing leaflets on the March on Rome, and Nerbini by participating in the March with his son Mario. Nonetheless, even in these cases business choices seem to prevail over any political faith.

Mondadori, in particular, aimed to become the publisher of the regime, a reason apparently behind the choice of managing *Il Secolo*, which Mondadori planned to make the regime's newspaper in opposition to *Il Corriere della Sera*. However, although his actions and connections seemed to have gained him the favour of Mussolini himself, an informer claimed in 1932 that in the Mondadori company 'tutti – chi più o chi meno – [erano] antifascisti'.⁸⁹ While in 1937 Mondadori founded API – Anonima Periodici Italiani – with the declared aim of publishing Fascist periodicals ('per dar vita e consistenza a questo gruppo di pubblicazioni [Il Balilla, Passo Romano, Donna Fascista e Gioventù Sportiva]'), his books series 'Gialli' and 'Medusa' published many foreign authors, mainly British or American.⁹⁰ After the approval of the *leggi razziali* in 1938, Mondadori was accused of not supporting the regime's racial policies because he kept on publishing Jewish authors and, as a consequence, many books in his series were blacklisted. Finally, in June 1943, the pressure of censorship and recurrent sequestrations led Mondadori to stop the distribution of the 'Gialli' series.⁹¹ However, at the same time, Mondadori's most successful women's magazine, *Grazia*, launched to compete with Rizzoli's *Lei*, disseminated the Fascist ideal of *sposa e madre esemplare* through many of its columns, although, as analysed in chapter 4, this was far from the only image of women presented by the magazine. In other words, Mondadori seemed to have put his company's profits before his allegiance to Mussolini and the Fascist regime, or at least treated these as competing factors.

⁸⁸ Mazzuca, *La erre verde*, pp. 30-31 and pp. 100-101. Zavattini was fired by Rizzoli in 1936 because he joined the *sindacato dei giornalisti*.

⁸⁹ Bechis, Rizzo, *In nome della rosa*, pp. 31-33; Enrico Decleva, *Arnoldo Mondadori* (Turin: Utet, 1993), p. 141.

⁹⁰ Bechis, Rizzo, *In nome della rosa*, p. 66.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66 - 75. See also Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy*, p. 43.

Similarly to Mondadori, Giuseppe Nerbini, together with his son Mario, openly supported the Fascist regime. At the same time, they published American dime novels and, from 1934, comics. Although he published popular *romanzi d'appendice*, characterised by national-popular content and read by lower classes, Nerbini's real success came when he introduced into Italy American adventure comics, through the revolutionary magazine *L'Avventuroso*. After the invasion of Ethiopia (1935), when publishing foreign material began to be condemned by the Fascist regime as against the Italian 'race's' interests, and the Fascist campaign for cultural autarchy aimed to free Italian culture from foreign influence, the popularity of American comics was nevertheless on the rise, as explored in chapter 2. When the Fascist regime banned American comics in 1938, Nerbini, specifically accused of printing material not suitable for children, sought the help of Mussolini himself through his *segretario particolare*, highlighting his Fascist faith in order to keep publishing his comic magazine.⁹² However, Nerbini was not able to save his magazines from Fascist censorship, and the Fascist ban on foreign comics caused a massive fall in numbers of copies sold. Moreover, possibly due to his resistance to the ban on American comics, which he published until 1941, in 1943 Nerbini's offices and archives were attacked by a group of *squadristi* and his magazines burnt.

The three publishers, Nerbini, Mondadori, and Rizzoli, all knew Mussolini personally, and had strong connections with prominent figures within the regime. Nonetheless, they all suffered from Fascist censorship and put their business interests before any political beliefs, only complying with the regime's censorship demands when they had to. These publishers were also self-consciously producing cultural products consistent with models coming from other European countries and the United States, adopting the same successful formulas and editorial patterns that secured them a faithful readership, developing modern mass-produced – and mass-read – magazines. Their activities also confirm the margin of freedom experienced by the periodical press compared to the daily press and book production, and, above all, demonstrate that publishers' production was predominantly business-oriented, highlighting the nature of magazines as commercial products. In other words, magazines created by Nerbini, Mondadori, and Rizzoli reflected their readers' tastes, in order to sell as many copies as possible, and thus

⁹² Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, pp. 127-130. A similar attitude was adopted by Leo Longanesi after his *Omnibus* was forcedly closed (see chapter 3).

mirrored the modernisation of taste and values within Italian society, as much as any imposed set of Fascist beliefs and values.

Readers were also part of the relationship between magazines and the Fascist regime. Magazines like *L'Avventuroso* and *Grazia*, for example, were read mainly by children born in the 1920s and young women, respectively, which means that they were a product of the Fascist regime's education. *Grazia*, for example, was taken as a point of reference – a guide to modern times – by young women, who were growing up in a context completely different from their mothers'. These young readers sought advice from columns in *Grazia* and other women's magazines on adapting traditional models of behaviour to modern times and needs. Not only did these women rely on the advice columns to find answers to doubts and everyday problems, but they also approached magazines in a new way compared to their mothers: they were active *consumers* and not simply readers anymore; they interacted with the magazine writing letters, sending photographs and competing in contests, thus not only relying on the magazine's guidance, but also contributing to the creation of the magazine itself. Equally, the children growing up reading *L'Avventuroso* – mainly born in the first half of the 1920s – fell in love with American comics heroes, and while they were being educated by the Fascist regime and structured in Fascist organisations, it is likely that the American stories became part of their playing patterns and exotic imaginary, as had happened at the beginning of the century with Buffalo Bill.⁹³ In other words, readers educated by the Fascist regime became the affectionate readership of popular magazines, which were disseminating images and lifestyles which did not entirely coincide with the Fascist precepts. Hollywood represents possibly the clearest parallel example of this, with photographs of film stars attracting readers – as remembered by Zavattini – and setting new models of beauty, as extensively described by Irene Brin:

Marlene Dietrich [...] inaugurò, al momento di partire per l'America, un ampio e fumoso velo da viaggio [...], e le signorine, fatte audaci, se ne ispiravano per il loro primo ballo. Gloria Swanson [...] si era fatta la

⁹³ See Oreste Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, ed. by Daniele Brolli (Bologna: Sergio Bonelli Editore, 2014), p. 112. In Umberto Eco, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (Milan: Bompiani, 2004), the protagonist recalls his childhood through, among other things, 1930s comics; it is worth mentioning that the title of the novel is taken from a *Cino e Franco*'s comic published by Nerbini in 1934 (see chapter 2). On the impact of Buffalo Bill show in Italy see Renee Laegreid, 'Finding the American West in Twentieth-First Century Italy', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 45.4, (2014) 411–430; and Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna. The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

promulgatrice del fasto sportivo, e fu probabilmente merito suo se i cappelli di feltro, ed i maglioni sobriamente decorati con una mazza da golf, divennero rapidamente popolari.⁹⁴

Grazia also offers a clear example of the detachment of young women from the Fascist prevailing model of beauty. Writing to the magazine expressing their worries about weighing too much, in spite of the regime's effort to propagate the curvaceous woman as the ideal model of beauty, these young women reveal how Hollywood standards of beauty conditioned their own ideal of beauty. Considering the popularity of a magazine such as *Novella*, which made film star photo its key feature, and that almost any *rotocalco* published photos of Hollywood stars – including *Omnibus* – the influence of American models of beauty on Italian women is not surprising. Once more, *rotocalchi* tend to mirror Italian society's popular models and habits in the 1930s alongside a reflection of the regime's influence and control, representing a useful means to study the complex impact of Fascism on Italian culture at a popular level.

As the example of Hollywood suggests, the 1930s were also characterised by the increasing influence of the prominent presence in the international arena of the United States. The myth of 'America' not only influenced Italian intellectuals, but also Italian people and culture in general, who through Hollywood saw the United States depicted as a dreamland. *Rotocalchi* not only provided their readers news and details about their favourite film stars; they also imitated the style of American illustrated magazines in layout and content – as Mondadori's *Tempo* (1939–1976) clearly shows. Italian *rotocalchi* of the 1930s were steeped in American culture, and the American model became a key point of reference for Italian publishers. For this reason, it is worth dwelling on the relationship between both the Fascist regime and Italian culture with America. The following section explores the ambivalent relationship of the Fascist regime with the United States, and highlights similarities and differences between Italian and American popular magazines.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Irene Brin, *Usi e costumi. 1920-1940*, 3rd edn (Palermo: Sellerio, 2001), pp. 92-95 and p. 116. Irene Brin regularly wrote a column on fashion in *Omnibus* (1937-1939), using also the pseudonym 'Mariù'.

⁹⁵ A fascination with America can also be found in German and French magazines. See for example *Vu*, 16 December 1931, entirely focussed on America; and the German *BIZ*, 9 August 1930, which reveals the ambivalent perception of American culture after 1929; on the representation of the United States in the *BIZ* see Horst Jorgen, 'American Seen from Within and Without', in *American Photographs in Europe*, ed. By David Nye and Mick Gidley (Amsterdam: Vu University Press, 1994), pp. 157–188. On the influence of American culture on the British press see Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

3. Fascist Italy and the perception of ‘America’ as a myth, a model, and a threat

Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, American society, economy, and politics experienced a transformation which made the United States one of the most powerful countries in the world. In the interwar years, the importance of this new role in the international scene was accompanied by the spreading of the *American way of life* through American culture and products, which in those years began to invade the European market. The Fascist regime, which in the second half of the 1930s launched a plan for economic and cultural autarchy, viewed the United States both as a model and, particularly from 1936, a threat to the Italian spirit. In spite of the Fascist efforts to create a purely Italian culture, and the opposition to the spreading of American products and culture – as film industry regulation and censorship on translations and publication in general demonstrate – the perception of America was more ambivalent than it may seem. As Jane Dunnett has argued, in the Fascist era Italian culture was in dialogue with American culture, reflecting the complexity and ambiguities of the Fascist regime and overcoming the idea of its monolithic opposition to America.⁹⁶ A key starting point of this dissertation is that this dialogue was not limited only to the cinematographic, literary, and intellectual fields, but it also permeated the production of Italian popular magazines.

3.1 An ambivalent image of the United States: the view from Fascist Italy

After the Great War, Europe was experiencing a phase of uncertainty and instability which many viewed as a sign of decline of European civilisation. The decadence of European culture, the loss of centrality, and the advent of the masses were seen as the end of the European order, as predicted by Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918 and 1922) and described by Paul Valéry’s *The Crisis of the Mind* (1919) and José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). Whereas Europe was struggling to deal with modernisation and the participation of the masses to public life, American economic and political power was rising, and its society and culture became the symbol of modernity, perceived both as a threat and a model. ‘America’ became synonymous with ‘modernity’, and was identified with mass production, mass culture and consumption, a model disseminated in Europe by American products.

⁹⁶ See Jane Dunnett, *The ‘mito americano’ and Italian Literary Culture Under Fascism* (Ariccia: Aracne, 2015).

The Fascist regime, which saw ‘Americanism as the main mythical metaphors of modernity’,⁹⁷ responded to the modern challenge in a unique way, presenting itself as able to combine modernity and spirituality, thus creating a modern mass society without losing national traditions and identity. In other words, the Fascist regime offered an alternative model that could revitalise Italy and set an example for the rest of the world. Nonetheless, throughout the Fascist era ambivalent feelings towards American culture can be observed, which determined a conflicting attitude towards the United States. Two main phases can be identified: a first phase – from 1922 up to 1937 – during which the United States was admired but characterised by the rising of negative critiques against American society after the 1929 crisis; and a second phase – from the late 1937 to the collapse of the Fascist regime – when the anti-American propaganda increased and finally reached its peak during the war.⁹⁸

The relationship of the Fascist regime with the United States and their modern culture and society offers an interesting case for the study of modernisation – through the process of *Americanisation* – of Italian society in the interwar years. Italian magazines were a product which reflected both the American commercial invasion of Europe – with films, make-up, fashion, interior design, and entertainment habits influencing and attracting Italian consumers – and the Fascist regime’s position towards the United States, revealing the contradictions and discrepancy between Italian society and Fascism, and within Fascist culture itself.

The ambivalent relationship the Fascist regime had with ‘America’ has been widely studied.⁹⁹ It is not possible here to analyse all the elements that characterised the complex and ambivalent way the Fascist regime looked at the United States; however, to understand the significance of the presence of American culture in popular Italian magazines, it is important to outline how the United States was depicted and perceived by the Fascist regime, particularly as

⁹⁷ Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 161.

⁹⁸ The myth of America shared by many Italian intellectuals has been later interpreted as a form of anti-Fascism and resistance to the Fascist culture, see for example Dominique Fernandez, *Il mito dell'America negli intellettuali italiani* (Caltanissetta: Sciascia, 1969). The discovery of American authors by Italian intellectuals in the 1930s had both cultural and political significance: cultural, because American literature was the result of a culture without the past and traditions that anchored Italian literature; political, because the United States represented democracy and freedom, an opposite model to the Italian Fascism. See Michel Beynet, *L'image de l'Amérique dans la culture Italienne de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Aix en Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1990), particularly p. 35; and Antonio Gramsci, *Nel mondo grande e terribile. Antologia degli scritti 1914-1935*, ed. by Giuseppe Vacca (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), particularly ‘Quaderno 22 (Americanismo e fordismo)’.

⁹⁹ See Beynet, *L'image de l'Amérique*; Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*; and Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*.

concerns politics, economics, and society; modernity; and women. All these three aspects of the perception the Fascist regime had of America were reflected in Italian popular magazines.¹⁰⁰

1) Politics, economics, and society.

When Mussolini formed his government in 1922, the relationship between Italy and the United States evolved around war debts and migration flow, with an increasing number of Italians settling in North America. In one of his first addresses to the Parliament, on 16 November 1922, Mussolini declared: ‘i nostri rapporti con gli Stati Uniti sono ottimi e sarà mia cura di perfezionarli, soprattutto nel campo di una desiderabile intima collaborazione d’ordine economico’.¹⁰¹ Not only was a good relationship with the United States desirable, but it was essential to attract American investors, settle the Italian migration quota on more favourable terms, disseminate an image of Italy as a strong protagonist in the international arena and, more importantly, consolidate the Fascist regime.¹⁰²

The appointment of Dino Grandi as Foreign Minister (12 September 1929), contributed to the consolidation of a friendly relationship between the two states. In spite of the Fascist regime’s aggressive colonial ideology and policies, Grandi supported international disarmament, which would have aligned Italy with the American position.¹⁰³ In what can be defined as a first phase of the Fascist regime’s attitude towards America, characterised by the attempt to build a strong alliance with the United States, the Fascist regime highlighted the features the two nations had in common, such as the youthfulness of their people and spirit, in opposition to the obsolete and old European liberal regimes.

Whereas Italy was an underdeveloped country that was left weakened by the Great War, the United States was a modern nation with a powerful and growing economy that was gaining increasing importance in Europe. In the eyes of the Fascist regime, the United States represented

¹⁰⁰ Although important, for reasons of space the relationship of Italian intellectuals with American culture is not included in this dissertation. On the topic see Claudio Antonelli, *Pavese, Vittorini e gli americanisti* (Florence: Edarc edizioni, 2008); *Chi stramalediva gli inglesi. La diffusione della letteratura inglese e americana in Italia tra le due guerre*, ed. by Arturo Cattaneo (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2007); Dunnett, *The ‘mito americano’*; Cesare Pavese, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Mussolini, ‘Il primo discorso presidenziale alla Camera dei Deputati’, 16 November 1922, *Opera Omnia*, XIX, pp. 15 – 24 (21).

¹⁰² Claudia Damiani, *Mussolini e gli Stati Uniti, 1922-1935* (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1980), p. 14.

¹⁰³ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso, 1929 – 1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), pp. 367 – 370.

a model of power and a way to elevate Italy's reputation. However, after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 harsh critiques against American society emerged.

American society began to be depicted as a dangerous degeneracy, a result of modern habits, reckless consumerism and capitalism, whose decay was revealed by the Wall Street Crash. From that moment, the Fascist regime highlighted its own uniqueness as a third way that represented the answer to the failure of capitalistic society, and the only alternative to socialism: as a new ideology, Fascism was the answer to the time's uncertainty.¹⁰⁴ However, the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 changed again the way the Fascist regime perceived the United States, strengthening the alleged analogies between the two countries. Fascist Italy looked to President Roosevelt with admiration especially after the first New Deal, which recalled in many aspects the Italian corporativism. As Mussolini stated, 'l'appello alla risolutezza e alla sobrietà virile della gioventù nazionale, con cui Roosevelt esorta [...] alla lotta i suoi elettori, ricorda i modi e i mezzi con cui il fascismo ha ridestato il popolo italiano'.¹⁰⁵ In particular, the National Recovery Administration agency (1933) revealed, according to Mussolini, the 'principio secondo il quale lo Stato non lascia più l'economia al controllo dei suoi specifici meccanismi [...] Senza dubbio lo spirito che accompagna questo cambio di rotta assomiglia a quello del fascismo'.¹⁰⁶ In 1935, Roosevelt's economic policies were seen as an expression of the Italian corporativism, 'un corporativismo senza corporazioni' as defined by *Gerarchia*.¹⁰⁷ However, Fascist Italy's aggressive policies in Africa and the declaration of the Italian Empire in May 1936 changed the relationship between Fascist Italy and the United States, marking the beginning of what can be defined as a second phase, characterised by an increasing anti-American propaganda carried out by the Fascist regime.¹⁰⁸ In particular, after Roosevelt's *Quarantine Speech* in 1937, the Fascist regime turned to an anti-American position, which

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the "Third Way"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2 (1996), 293 - 316 (p. 297).

¹⁰⁵ Mussolini's preface to the Italian edition of FDR's book, *Guardando nel futuro (Looking Forward)* (Milan: Bompiani, 1933), quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tre New Deal* (Milan: Marco Tropea Editore, 2008), p. 27. On the perception of the New Deal in Italy see also Marco Sedda, 'Il New Deal nella pubblicistica politica italiana dal 1933 al 1938', *Il Politico*, 64.2 (1999), 241-275.

¹⁰⁶ Schivelbusch, *Tre New Deal*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ See Giovanni Selvi, 'Fermentazione fascista nel mondo,' *Gerarchia*, 15 (1935), 567-582 (particularly pp. 576-577).

¹⁰⁸ On Fascist Italy's anti-Americanism see Emilio Gentile, 'Impending Modernity: Fascism and the Ambivalent Image of the United States', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993) 7-9; Anna Maria Martellone, "'Blood against Gold": Anti-American Propaganda in Fascist Italy', *Storia Nordamericana*, 3.2 (1986) 55-56; Michela Nacci, *L'antiamericanismo in Italia negli anni trenta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989).

became open opposition from 1938, reaching its peak during the war – and whose effects are clearly reflected in the censorship against American cultural products.¹⁰⁹

In the ambiguities and contradictions that characterised Fascist Italy's anti-Americanism, recurrent themes can be identified. The first theme, strictly connected to the Fascist approach to modernisation – discussed in the following section –, depicted and condemned American society as a 'mechanical civilisation' in which machines were increasingly present in everyday life – a frantic life constantly focused on efficiency. By relying on machines rather than on the human spirit, American society was seen as decadent and mechanical.¹¹⁰ The second recurrent topic was the youthfulness of America and its obsolescence. As a new nation, the United States did not have any past, hence no history; however, at the same time, it was an old society: 'vecchia perché in realtà era una prosecuzione dell'Europa, ma anche perché quando pure avesse trionfato, la sua barbarie avrebbe comportato automaticamente la fine di ogni civiltà'.¹¹¹ Connected to these two main themes there were also two popular stereotypes that defined American civilisation as materialistic – made of people only focused on 'lavorare, consumare e chiedere "quanto costa?"' – and barbarian – 'la mancanza di storia della breve vita dell'America si traduceva automaticamente in mancanza di cultura, cattivo gusto, assenza di tradizioni'.¹¹²

All these leitmotifs were strictly connected to modernity, a crucial and recurrent topic in the contradictory and ambivalent relationship of the Fascist regime with American culture.

2) Modernity.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Fascist Italy had to face the increasing social and materialistic expectations of Italian people. However, the problems posed by the demographic and economic crises made it difficult for the regime to satisfy the Italians' desires. Moreover, these expectations were fostered by American products: through films and advertisements, the *American way of life* was exported to Italy, causing negative reactions among the Fascist rulers. While Italian people preferred American products over Italian or other European brands, the

¹⁰⁹ See Dorothy Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" Speech', *Political Science Quarterly*, 72.3 (1957) 405–433.

¹¹⁰ Gentile, *Impending Modernity*, pp. 11–12.

¹¹¹ *Dizionario Del Fascismo*, ed. by Victoria de Grazia, Sergio Luzzatto, 2 vols, (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), II, 63.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Fascist ideologues accused American culture of corrupting the Italian spirit.¹¹³ Their main worry was the spreading of an American snobbery which was contaminating Italy's morals, challenging one of the most prominent features of the Fascist 'new man': tradition. In other words, American products were disseminating a new model of living that was conditioning and changing Italian society's habits and tastes, endangering the national traditions. The Fascist moralists

condemned American society as a modern Sodom where sexual freedom, the disintegration of the family, the practice of contraception, the search for material well-being, the cult of wealth, ruthless capitalism, dehumanising technology, urban neurosis, corrupt politics, racial discrimination and organised crime were rampant.¹¹⁴

Nonetheless, in his first speech addressed to the American people, on 14 December 1926, Mussolini claimed he felt 'la più cordiale amicizia per gli Stati Uniti', declared Italy a modern nation and expressed his confidence that the two countries had common values: 'L'Italia d'oggi, come l'America, è sana, semplice e piena di fiducia in se stessa'.¹¹⁵ In opposition to the most common anti-American stereotype, which defined American civilisation as led by machines, Mussolini affirmed:

la civiltà americana è stata accusata di essere dominata esclusivamente da fattori meccanici e materiali e di trovare i propri impulsi solo nel desiderio del guadagno. Nulla potrebbe essere più falso. La civiltà nord-americana ha dato un notevole contributo all'attività spirituale del mondo. Essa produrrà ancora più in avvenire.¹¹⁶

However, this view contrasted with the Fascist ideology that aimed to fight the dehumanising effects of technology and

¹¹³ Gentile, 'Impending Modernity', p. 10; Henry Ashby Turner Jr., 'Fascism and Modernization', *World Politics*, 24.4 (1972), 547-564 (p. 558).

¹¹⁴ Gentile, 'Impending Modernity', p. 10.

¹¹⁵ Mussolini, 'Primo messaggio al popolo americano', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 16 December 1926, *Opera Omnia*, XXII, pp. 290-291 (290).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

ristabili[re] nel mondo contemporaneo gli equilibri necessari, ivi compreso quello fra uomo e macchina: questa può soggiogare l'individuo, ma sarà piegata dallo Stato, il quale la ricondurrà al servizio dell'uomo e della collettività come strumento di liberazione, non come accumulatrice di miserie.¹¹⁷

This contradiction is not only a clear example of ambivalence of the image of the United States in Italy during the Fascist era, but also of the relationship the regime had with modernity. Mussolini presented Fascism as a modern movement, a political expression of modernity that aimed to modernise Italy and its society without changing social structures, which resulted in a contradictory modernisation anchored to traditional values. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat put it, Mussolini aimed to 'the creation of a "national" version of modernity that would permit the retention of spirituality and specificity'.¹¹⁸ Spirituality was indeed the key word of Fascist modernity: against the annihilation of the individual carried out by socialism, and the degeneration and standardisation of man embodied by the United States, modern (Fascist) Italy represented an alternative that combined modernity and spirituality. To support this view of Fascism as a third way, the regime disseminated negative images of the United States – the modern nation par excellence – and their heavy industrialisation and mass production. At the other end of the spectrum, Fascism defended Italians from standardisation and spiritual impoverishment with strong moral values.

After the 1929 crisis, the Fascist regime put more emphasis on the idea of Italian modernity as an autonomous model. In particular, it was a reaction to the American way of life that Fascists ideologues viewed as a threat to the Italian lifestyle and, more importantly, its spirit. American products were identified by Italian consumers with elegance and freedom, urging the Fascist regime to propagate anti-American messages to counterbalance the American cultural invasion:

Oggi il nemico vero è disarmato [...] entra in casa nostra coi giornali, colle fotografie, coi libri che ne diffondono la mentalità. Guardati intorno, italiano; scorgerai l'americanismo davanti, a destra, a sinistra, dietro di te [...] sorridiamo con compiacenza, talvolta esaltandoli e coprendoli d'onori, a coloro che si sforzano di introdurre fra noi i principi dissolvitori della nostra salute spirituale.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Mussolini, 'Sintesi del regime', 18 March 1934, *Opera Omnia*, XXVI, pp. 185–193 (186); Gentile, 'Impending Modernity', pp. 19–22.

¹¹⁸ Ben-Ghiat, 'Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the "Third Way"', pp. 290–297.

¹¹⁹ Orco Bisorco (Mino Maccari), 'Gazzettino ufficiale del Strapaese', *Il Selvaggio*, 30 March 1928, p. 21.

Harsh critiques also came from intellectuals and non-Fascist militants, such as Mario Soldati, whose book *America primo amore* portrayed a barbarian, insensitive and violent civilisation. In the modern American society, the individual put himself at the centre, pursuing his own interests above anything else because of America's uncontrolled capitalism. According to Soldati, only the 'nuova razza americana' could bear the levelling of its neurotic society, whose happiness was frustrated and its soul drained by countless comforts.¹²⁰

Similarly, Alberto Moravia described the United States in correspondence as a place where 'si è continuamente tentati; violentati dalle cose da mangiare da comprare da godere e tutte queste cose si possono ottenere senza sforzo personale [...] è un po' la tentazione del bazar e [...] del bordello'.¹²¹

Consumerism, a modern trait derived from capitalism, was levelling American society and depriving American people of their own identity:

La mentalità 'standard' è come un'enorme piovra che stende i suoi tentacoli su tutta la vita esteriore, imprigiona l'anima e la mente, e costringe le idee e gli atteggiamenti a uniformarsi a un tipo unico, allo stesso modo con cui i grandi stabilimenti meccanici producono i diversi pezzi di un'automobile secondo una sagoma unitaria.¹²²

In a process started in the 1920s, the urbanisation, mass production, and constant economic growth, and the subsequent increased spending power of Americans, turned the American citizens into *consumers*. This evolution particularly affected the role of women within the family, whose emancipation was harshly criticised and antagonised by the Fascist regime. Modern American society was seen as a degeneration also because of the emancipation of women, which the Fascist regime used in its anti-American propaganda as a model of all negative consequences of modernisation.

¹²⁰ Mario Soldati, *America primo amore* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003) pp. 70 and ff. (first ed: Florence: Bemporad, 1935). In the book, Soldati describes his experience as an emigrant to the United States, from the admiration of American lifestyle and wealth, to the disappointment of a reality far from the American myth. See Ambra Meda, 'L'Italianità "naufregata": Rappresentazioni letterarie dell'emigrato italiano in America nell'odeporica del Ventennio', *Italica*, 90.2 (2013), 210-226 (pp. 211-213).

¹²¹ Alberto Moravia, Giuseppe Prezzolini, *Lettere* (Milan: Rusconi, 1982), p. 21.

¹²² Valentino Piccoli, 'Babbit o l'uomo standard', *Critica fascista*, 1 December 1932.

3) Women.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were mainly three factors that defined modern American women, or at least their image: their presence in the employment, not only as secretaries but also in skilled jobs; their sexual emancipation, thanks to the acknowledgement of female sexuality and the subsequent rethinking of marriage; and their participation in mass production, mainly as the subject of advertising campaigns.¹²³ Whereas the Fascist regime aimed to bring them back in the home as mothers and wives, in the United States women were emancipated modern consumers, identifiable with the ‘flapper’, a fashionable and independent new woman, and the modern housewife.¹²⁴

In the United States, thanks to domestic electric appliances, ready-to-eat meals, and innovative methods for the education of children, American housewives had free time for activities outside the house. They performed a traditional role with modern means and became the main target of advertising campaigns and mail-order shopping. Modern housewives were the subject and object of modern marketing strategies, representing the consumer par excellence, because the majority of the shopping was carried out by women, and modern education methods and management of the house were performed through consumption.¹²⁵ American housewives, freed by domestic appliances, soon became one of the main symbols of the American way of life, a model exported abroad as representative of a new consumerism that was becoming an original American social model.

Nonetheless, the most iconic symbol of modern American women was the model of the flapper, who represented financial independence, sexual freedom, and a modern idea of marriage. Aesthetically, the flapper was identified by a tomboyish appearance, with short hair and a trim body, dressed in clothing that would hide her figure but show the legs. This model of woman overturned the model of femininity that had dominated the nineteenth century (embodied by the ‘Gibson girl’) and represented sexual, political and financial emancipation of women in

¹²³ Nancy F. Cott, ‘La donna moderna “stile americano”: gli anni Venti’, in *Storia delle donne. Il Novecento*, ed. by Françoise Thébaud (Rome: Laterza, 2011), pp. 91–110.

¹²⁴ The reaction of the Fascist regime to the spreading of the model of the American ‘flapper’, and of modern models of femininity influenced by Hollywood stars, is explored in more detail in chapter 4.

¹²⁵ Cott, ‘La donna moderna “stile americano”’, pp. 91–110.

the 1920s.¹²⁶ In other words, the flapper embodied the emancipation of women from the household, a working woman that knew how to enjoy her free time; she was a product of the wealth of the roaring Twenties.

In the 1930s, in the United States the flapper was perceived as a superficial woman more interested in fashion and sexuality rather than politics, disseminating the idea that women had rejected political emancipation for sexual freedom. Moreover, the flapper was identified with premarital sex, birth control, masculine behaviour like smoking and drinking in public, and with a general disdain of traditional values and morals. As a result, in the United States the emancipation of women began to be associated with moral decay and family decline.¹²⁷

In Europe, the echoes of American women's emancipation created the stereotype of the 'new woman', harshly criticised by the Fascist regime. According to the reporters of the time, such as Arnaldo Cipolla, sexual freedom in the United States was one of the main consequences of women's emancipation, which was a product of the materialistic and mechanical American civilisation. At the end of the 1930s, this negative view became part of a more generalised critique to the American way of life, which was seen as the decadence of the youth and the demonstration of the failure of American society.¹²⁸

The Fascist regime aimed to oppose emancipation, suggesting a traditional model of femininity both taking advantage and preventing modernisation. The Fascist organisations for young women insisted on the virtues of domestic life, but at the same time involved the girls in activities outside the home, mining the authority of their parents and indirectly emancipating them.¹²⁹ Against the model of the emancipated American woman, the Fascist regime created the model of the *donna-crisi*, identifiable with the flapper and contrasted with an opposite model of femininity: a curvaceous woman focused on her family and the education of her children. This contrast is clearly represented by Mino Maccari in a comic vignette published in *Il Selvaggio*, in which he portrayed a skinny woman drinking in public, representing modernity's decadence.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *Le americane. Donne e immagini di donne fra Belle Époque e fascismo*, ed. by Daniela Rossini (Rome: Biblink, 2008), pp. 35–36.

¹²⁷ Estelle B. Freedman, 'The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s', *The Journal of American History*, 61.2 (1974), 372–393 (p. 379).

¹²⁸ See Bruno P. F. Wanrooj, 'The American "Model" in the Moral Education', *Ricerche Storiche*, XVI, 2 (1986) 407–423.

¹²⁹ See Victoria de Grazia *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), particularly pp. 1–15; and pp. 201–233. The image of women under the Fascist regime is discussed in more detail in the analysis of *Grazia* in chapter 4.

¹³⁰ See 'Cocktail', *Il Selvaggio*, 15 June 1932.

The Fascist regime's rejection of the American model of beauty reflected its generally ambivalent attitude to American culture and modernity. Up until the establishment of the dictatorship, American standards of beauty were not only tolerated but even accepted by the Fascist regime. The very first suit of the *Giovani italiane*, for example, was initially modelled to imitate the American tomboy style, following the American fashion models that were dominating Europe, the blouse thus shaped to minimise the young women's figure. With the beginning of the *fascistizzazione*, new beauty models opposing the American flapper were imposed: a generous female figure was praised and curves glorified as a sign of fertility, and hence of womanhood.¹³¹

Nonetheless, the fascination Italian women had with the American model, mainly disseminated by films and adverts, challenged the Fascist ideal of femininity. Despite the deterioration during the war of the relationship between the two countries, and the Fascist censorship forbidding any foreign and particularly American influence, Italian women continued to follow the American model of beauty, bleaching their hair to imitate Hollywood stars.¹³²

These ambivalent attitudes towards America were clearly and repeatedly mirrored and shaped by the Italian magazines of the time.¹³³ Not only did they reflect models coming from America, but *rotocalchi* were also influenced by American culture in their layout, content and structure, challenging the Fascist regime's aim of creating an autarchic culture. In the following section, American popular press is examined in order to establish similarities and highlight differences between American and Italian popular magazines.

3.1 The illustrated popular press, a model from America?

Between 1890 and 1905, American magazines tripled their circulation and became the first national mass medium, informing, entertaining, and 'shaping the consciousness of millions of

¹³¹ Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body. Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 59–60.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 169–171.

¹³³ It is worth highlighting that ambivalent feelings towards American culture were also part of Italian culture before and after the Fascist regime. See *L'antiamericanismo in Italia e in Europa nel secondo dopoguerra*, ed. by Piero Craveri and Gaetano Quagliariello (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004); Romano Vulpitta, *L'antiamericanismo in Italia. Un problema di identità nazionale* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 2012).

Americans'.¹³⁴ Thanks to a lower cost of paper, increased advertising, and the introduction of the innovative printing technique of the halftone, publishers were able to produce cheap magazines and sell them for as little as ten cents a copy. Similar to newspapers' Sunday supplements, these magazines were characterized by 'copious and well-printed illustration, liveliness matter, a serious treatment of contemporary problems, a keen interest in new inventions and progress in general, and attention to major world'.¹³⁵ As Scottish critic William Archer described them, 'there [was] nothing quite like [the American cheap magazines] in the literature of the world – no periodicals which combine[d] such width of popular appeal with such seriousness of aim and thoroughness of workmanship'.¹³⁶ Such description, limited to the Italian field, could easily be applied to *Omnibus*, which in the 1930s was the first magazine to be published in Italy with such features, combining serious culture with popular entertainment to satisfy a wide range of readers. In other words, as far as the expansion of the readership is concerned, the American cheap magazines revolution of the 1890s can be compared to the Italian *rotocalchi* innovation of the 1930s. In Italy, the rotogravure technique revolutionised the periodical publication sector as much as the halftone did in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The presence of well-printed illustrations, advertisements, literature, comments on current events, and lighter topics such as cinema and other forms of arts and entertainments make these revolutionary publications comparable.¹³⁷ Similarly, as it had happened at the beginning of the century, the Italian *rotocalchi* revolution followed the development of photojournalism in Europe, where countries such as France and Germany, also influenced by the American model, were already ahead of Italy as far as popular illustrated magazines and expansion of the readership are concerned.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ David Sumner, *The Magazine Century: American Magazines since 1900* (New York; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 16.

¹³⁵ Frank L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1791–1930*, 5 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959–1968), IV, p. 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ For reasons of space, it has not been possible to include an analysis of magazines production methods in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – whose influence can be noted in Italian *rotocalchi* as examined in the following chapters.

¹³⁸ In France, for example, the years 1840–1914 mark the 'golden age' of the French press, whereas in Germany the 1920s is the decade in which the illustrated press flourished. On the development of the European press and each country's distinctive features see Daniel C. Hallin, Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), particularly pp. 92–99 on the French press; pp. 155–158 on the German press; and 'The North Atlantic or Liberal Model', pp. 198–248 on the Anglo-American model of mass media.

Although the Italian and American path to modern magazines can be compared, the two publishing systems were far from similar. On the one hand, there was the American mass production model, with circulation numbers that easily reached hundreds of thousands of copies – with a popular magazine such as the *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, reaching one million copies in 1900. By the beginning of the twentieth century, in the United States 'magazine publishing became a mass production enterprise' based on advertising and conceiving readers as *consumers*.¹³⁹ Consistent with the transformations of American society at the turn of the century, magazines were standardised and a mass production process used to reach as many readers as possible, mainly by offering the same pattern that attracted them in the first place.¹⁴⁰

On the other hand, as already discussed, in Italy the development of a modern pattern of creation of popular illustrated magazines only started from the second half of the 1920s, fully developing its potential in the 1930s. However, the Italian publishing sector in the interwar years was far from the mass production and distribution system already in place in the United States. In Italy, the illiteracy rate limited the demand for publishing products, and left Italy behind compared to the United States and other European countries such as France, which had already reached high rates of literacy – and thus of publications distribution – at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁴¹ This difference not only affected Italy's distribution numbers, but also the organisation of publishing companies, as described in section 2.3 above.

Due to the inaccessibility of first-hand documentation, particularly as far as the Nerbini publishing company is concerned, it is hard to retrace practical aspects of production of magazines in 1930s Italy. Moreover, although there are numerous studies on daily press and book production under the Fascist regime, as already mentioned less attention has been dedicated to periodicals. Nonetheless, the examination of the magazines used as case studies in this dissertation, editors' biographies, and other secondary sources have made it possible to outline Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Nerbini's organisation of magazine production. As already mentioned, these publishers relied on a small group of people who worked in various roles – as editors, columnists, authors, translators, and even as layout artists – in different magazines, creating a

¹³⁹ Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), pp. 13–26, particularly p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 116–121.

¹⁴¹ Gianfranco Pedullà, 'Gli anni del fascismo: imprenditoria privata e intervento statale', in *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, p. 358.

network of people whose names recur in many major publications. This represents a distinctive feature of Italian magazines' production, particularly compared to the United States: whereas in Italy there was a small group of people producing the magazine, in the United States every magazine had a well organised editorial staff, often divided into sections focusing on one specific aspect of production – advertising, researching etc. – and dominated by the figure of the editor who supervised the work. Once a magazine had gained its distinctive and unique features that made it recognisable, the figure of the editor lost relevance and the publication would remain consistent in spite of a change in its staff, highlighting the standardisation of creation and production of American magazines. More importantly, the publisher 'performed a marketing function' and developed his formula to target with his magazine a specific sector of consumers.¹⁴²

In Italy, magazine production appears to have been less standardised and organised until the *rotocalchi* revolution. Even then, editorial staffs of Nerbini, Rizzoli, and Mondadori were dominated by the figure of the owner of the company and/or few collaborators, as is the case of Leo Longanesi, who edited and took final decisions on every aspect of *Omnibus* before printing any issue, or as the already mentioned Mario Nerbini. In the 1930s, working for these companies were formed the journalists, writers, and intellectuals who made the history of Italy's post-war press, such as Arrigo Benedetti, Mario Pannunzio, Mario Soldati, Indro Montanelli, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Dino Buzzati, Giorgio Scerbanenco, Irene Brin, Corrado Alvaro, Cesare Zavattini, Wanda Bontà, Elio Vittorini, Paolo Lorenzini – to mention only a few.

Finally, another characteristic that distinguished *rotocalchi* from other periodicals was advertising, which became particularly relevant in publications targeting a specific readership such as women's magazines. The development of a modern methodology of advertising, based on Taylorism and the American example, made advertisements part of a magazine's features, as is the case of *Grazia*, in which consumption become part of the magazine's message.¹⁴³ This sector represents another example of how the American model influenced Italy's modernisation

¹⁴² Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 30–33 and p. 41.

¹⁴³ On advertising in Italy see Adam Arvidsson, *Marketing modernity: Italian advertising from fascism to postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 2003); Bianca Gaudenzi, 'Commercial advertising in Germany and Italy, 1918–1943' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2011); Karen Pinkus, *Bodily regimes: Italian advertising under fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

of popular press, which in the 1930s reproduced and reinterpreted American features to produce mass circulation magazines.

4. Conclusion

The importance of the American model in post-war Italy has put under the spotlight the role of American culture in the shaping of Italian culture, particularly as far as literature and film studies are concerned. As explored in the following chapters, Italian *rotocalchi* in the interwar year were influenced by the American model. However, as already discussed and as will be explored in detail, Italian popular illustrated magazines were also shaped by other models coming from Western European countries.

Overall, during the 1920s and 1930s the American model fascinated many people in Italian society. Some intellectuals perceived ‘America’ as a myth and contributed to the creation and dissemination of such myth; women followed the Hollywood standards of beauty and were inspired by the look of famous film stars they could admire in magazines, and Italian children were growing up reading American comics while being educated by the Fascist regime.

The complex and ambivalent relationship of the Fascist regime with modernity complicated the relationship with American culture, often seen as the example of negative effects of modernisation and identified with standardisation and mass consumption. Therefore, the Fascist regime presented itself as a different model that would create an Italian way of mass consumption which would have preserved the national traditions and identity. After 1936, and particularly from 1937, the campaign for the autarchy complicated still further the relationship the Fascist regime had with American culture, a change that was reflected in and partly shaped by magazines, which from their part confirmed the presence of both the American model and the dialogue with American culture. For this reason, *rotocalchi* represent a privileged source for the examination of the modernisation of Italian society and mass press, its distinctive features and its relationship with America and other influences, as we will see in the case studies in chapter 2 to 4. The analysis of *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus* and *Grazia* will show the influence of America, whose model was imitated since Rizzoli, in the second half of the 1920s, began to use the first ‘American-style rotogravure presses [...] copying United States magazine format as well’.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 130.

Nonetheless, a close examination of these magazines is revealing of other forces that contributed to shape modern Italian popular press. Generally speaking, popular weeklies in the interwar years were shaped according to a similar set of features across Western Europe, as the already mentioned case of *Life*, *Tempo*, *Picture Post*, and *Match* demonstrate. Chapters 2 to 4 show how this multicultural exchange is visible throughout different field of the Italian popular press, highlighting a continuity in its process of modernisation, which always kept dialoguing with the European press field. Women's and general culture magazines in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy share indeed many similarities, as discussed throughout the thesis. However, the comic sector represents an exception. The following chapter, which analyses *L'Avventuroso*, shows how the American model prevailed over any other European influence as far as modern comics are concerned. Modern American models not only influenced Italian comics, but also other European countries such as France, for example, whose history of modern comics confirms how the development of modern mass press was characterised by a dialogue between Western Europe and the United States. As Maurice Horn put it, 'the preponderant role played by American artists and editors in the pioneering and development of [comics] is [...] testimony of the vitality, imagination and pre-eminence of the American culture in the modern world'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Maurice C. Horn, 'American Comics in France: a Cultural Evaluation', in *For Better or Worse: the American Influence in the World*, ed. by Allen F. Davis (Westport: Greenwood, 1981), pp. 49–60 (p. 60).

II. SPREADING A NEW *IMMAGINARIO*: *L'AVVENTUROSO* (1934 – 1943)

1. Introduction

The second half of the 1930s marks the beginning of the Golden Age of comics in the United States, and a key moment in the development of modern Italian comics. Like other publishing fields, children's periodicals went through a phase of modernisation in the interwar years, when American comics arrived in Europe.¹ In Italy, in particular, the second half of the 1930s was characterised by a comic craze which led to a sudden growth in production of comic magazines, expanding the readership to young adults, and modernising the children's press.

Modern comics were born in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, where they appeared as strips in mass-circulation newspapers and became a mass market product;² these early comic strips were aimed at adults, used crude language and often ridiculed the average American family and middle class social habits. When American comics arrived in Europe, they were altered and their satirical meaning removed. This is particularly true in Italy, where adapted forms of American comics were relegated to children's periodicals and transformed in their meaning.

American comics thus had a key influence on the development of modern Italian comics, and a study of how comics originated and were imported to Italy is crucial not only to understand comics as a new medium, but particularly for their impact on and importance in influencing Italian culture: comics heroes, situations, and characters originate from within a country's culture and society, whose values become part of and in turn are developed by those comics.³ As such,

¹ In the mid-1930s, the comic industry in France, Spain and Italy boomed, thanks to the success of American comics; whereas the UK was mainly exporting comics in Europe – see for example the case of 'Rob the Rover' mentioned later on – and Germany only developed a comic industry in the 1950s. See Federico Zanettin, 'Translation, Censorship and the Development of European Comics Cultures', *Perspectives*, 2017, pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2017.1351456> [Accessed 04 February 2018]. On the British comics' industry, a peculiar case in Europe due to its role in exporting comics, see in particular p. 6: 'In the 1930s, British comics were also exported to other European countries, most notably by Lotario Vecchi [...] While imported and reprinted to some extent, American comics did not have the revolutionary impact they had in continental Europe in the 1930s, and the comics industry remained primarily based on national production'. As examined below, Lotario Vecchi was an active protagonist of the comic publishing sector in Italy.

² Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture* (Washington, D.C.; London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), p. 9, and p. 81 and ff.

³ See for example Martin Lund, 'American Golem. Reading America through Super-New Dealers and the "Melting Pot"', in *Comic Books and American Cultural History*, ed. by Matthew Pustz (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 79–94.

comic magazines are revealing primary sources for the investigation of a society's culture and its people's imaginary.

In this chapter, comics are analysed in their role as a vehicle of foreign culture in Italian society through new forms of Italian print media. In particular, due to the nature of modern comics as a 'uniquely American' product,⁴ Italian comic magazines published in the 1930s and into the early part of 1943 offer an exceptional insight into the spreading of American models and morals in spite of the Fascist campaign for cultural autarchy in the same period. At the same time, because of the strong presence of American culture in comic magazines, they are also a highly relevant source for the analysis of the consequences of the cultural campaign for autarchy. In other words, the analysis of comics published in Italy during the 1930s can be used as a mirror of the set of morals and values, and cultural practices, of that era, and of the impact of and cracks in Fascist censorship.

It is important to understand how comics developed in the United States, since what Nerbini introduced in Italy with the publication of *L'Avventuroso* in 1934 were not only American superheroes as characters, but a set of values and cultural models created in a foreign country. Thus, section 1.1 introduces the origins of modern American comics, highlighting differences with Italian comics in the interwar years. Section 2 addresses the problems of importing and printing American comics in Italy, and analyses how, in the 1930s, Italian comics started to be shaped on the models of American strips. In both their original form and Italian adaptation, American heroes not only changed Italian comics and challenged the Fascist regime's control over the education of Italian children, but they also changed their Italian readership, from children to adolescents. Due to the cultural significance of comics, and their political implications during the Fascist campaign for the cultural autarchy, American comics were targeted by the regime from 1936, and accused of contaminating the moral values of the Italian youth. As they were spreading models of behaviour and morals that were not Italian, in 1938 the regime finally banned those American heroes that children had started to love. Section 2.1 introduces the origins of the Italian *fumetto*, whereas section 2.2 explores how Italian comic magazines changed in the Fascist era with the introduction of adventure comics. Finally, section 2.3 examines the Fascist regime's policies towards comics, its censorship, and its reaction against the American influence on Italian comics. The transformations of modern Italian comics

⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

are examined in detail in section 3 through the analysis of the main case study in this chapter:

L'Avventuroso, one of the most important and widely circulated comic magazines of the era. A close analysis of the issues published between 1934 and 1938 shows the importance of American models and sources in the development of modern Italian comics; the impact of the Fascist cultural campaign for the autarchy on comics; how Nerbini self-censored the American strips in *L'Avventuroso* order to avoid possible Fascist intervention; and how, despite all the efforts of the publishing company, *L'Avventuroso* nevertheless suffered a deep crisis after the Fascist regime banned all American comics in 1938.

Although it might seem that the field of American comics published in Italy has been widely studied, there is still a gap in the field that only the recent research by Fabio Gadducci, Leonardo Gori, and Sergio Lama, published in *Eccetto Topolino*, has partially filled.⁵ Studies on the history of the origins of modern comics in Italy fail to present a comprehensive picture of the spread of American models through comics in the Fascist era and, above all, of the process of *Italianisation* of foreign comics alongside the Americanisation of Italian comics.

The aim of this study is to fill this gap, bringing to light elements that show how American adventure comics changed the *immaginario collettivo*. Although a brief analysis of the Fascist cultural policies is necessary to contextualise the research, this study aims to overcome the political implications of the history of modern comics in the Fascist era, and highlight a process of Americanisation of Italian comics and of Italianisation of American comics. In other words, this study aims to demonstrate that modern Italian comics are the result of a process with two facets: the impact of American material, ideas and techniques, and the adaptation of these to Italian tastes and the Italian context.

⁵ Key studies on Italian comics include: Leonardo Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), p. 30; Claudio Bertieri, *Fumetti all'italiana* (Rome: Comic Art, 1989); *Il secolo del fumetto e lo spettacolo a strisce nella società italiana. 1908-2008*, ed. by Sergio Brancato (Latina: Tunuè, 2008); Claudio Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti* (Rimini-Florence: Guaraldi, 1973); Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*; Giovanni Genovesi, *La stampa periodica per ragazzi: Da Cuore a Charlie Brown* (Parma: Guanda, 1972); Sergio Trincherò, Giorgio Salvucci, *I giornalotti* (Rome: Revival, 1971). On American comics see Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men. A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Nicky Wright, *The Classic Era of American comics* (London: Prion, 2000). Key studies on the definition of comics as a medium see Aaron Meskin, 'Defining Comics?', *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 65.4 (2007), 369–379 (pp. 369–370); *Comics and Culture. Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*, ed. by Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christian Christiansen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000).

1.1 American comics

It would not be possible to offer here a complete history of American comics, but it is useful to highlight some key factors in their development, which are fundamental for the comprehension of the Italian history of comics, and the differences between them.

First, American comics began to be published in the 1890s as comic strips in newspapers as daily strips or in the form of pull out supplements on Sundays, meaning that they were aimed at an adult readership.⁶ The publication of comics as strips in ‘mass-circulated newspapers [...] set American comic strips apart from the earlier European forms [of illustrations and caricatures] and made them mass market products’.⁷ By the 1930s, the comic strip page was so successful that it was described by a survey as ‘the most read [page] on Sunday newspapers’.⁸ It was from daily and Sunday comic strips that in 1929 the very first comic magazine was published: *The Funnies* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1929 - 1930).⁹ In these origins of American comic magazines lies the first crucial difference with Italian comic history: in Italy, comics began to be published in children’s periodicals at the beginning of the twentieth century, thus excluding adults from their readership.

Second, modern American comic magazines developed from a marketing experiment carried out by companies such as Gulf Oil, and Procter and Gamble. In 1933, Gulf Oil published its own comic weekly, *Gulf Comic Weekly*, which only featured original strips and was given away at their service stations. The weekly was so successful that it soon reached 3 million copies, and its example was followed by Procter and Gamble, which started publishing its own magazine, *Funnies on Parade*. This free pamphlet contained already published comic strips, and it was ‘the first stapled half-tabloid-size pamphlet of comics of the kind that would later be known in the realm of American popular publishing as “comic books”’.¹⁰ The process of creation

⁶ *Comics in Translation*, ed. by Federico Zanettin (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1–2. In Italy the *Corrierino* was published as a supplement of the *Corriere della Sera*; however, it was sold separately, highlighting the difference in the readership targeted by the American and Italian publications.

⁷ Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 8–9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Although the two media – ‘comic strip’ and ‘comic book’ – overlap, there is a substantial difference in their format and, in particular, the audience targeted: ‘comic strips are a syndicated feature in newspapers sold to a mass and mostly adult audience, comic books are created, distributed, and sold on their own merits to a paying [...] young audience’. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, pp. xiii–xiv. Due to its cost, too high to guarantee a regular readership, after the 36th issue *The Funnies* was shut down. This publication represents a crucial step towards the modern formula of the comic book.

¹⁰ Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, pp. 8–9 and p. 17. *Funnies on Parade* set the format of modern comics and was a model for other publications, such as *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics*, published in 100,000 copies by

of comic magazines represents another key difference with modern Italian comic magazines, which also influenced the readership targeted: comic magazines were created in America as a give-away to attract customers, while they were born in Italy as a profitable product specifically aimed at children to be sold on newsstands. In other words, comic magazines were created in Italy by publishing companies already active in the periodical press field, whereas in America they were the result of commercial practices enacted by companies outside the publishing industry.

Third, although American comic magazines derived from newspaper strips, they were influenced strongly by film animation and pulp magazines. The latter in particular seem to have had a crucial role in the development of the modern comic magazine. According to Paul Lopes ‘the field of pulp magazines [...] had the greatest direct influence on the structure and rules of art in the new field of comic books’.¹¹ This is due to the involvement of the most successful comic book publishers in the pulp industry, and on the nature of the pulp product itself, which aimed to be a low-budget and low-commitment entertainment product.¹² Indeed, in the era of the Depression, American readers aimed for purely escapist literature. Pulp magazines, as well as daily comic strips and comic magazines, offered to the public adventures and light stories that could distract them from grim daily news. Quoting historian Mike Benton, Lopes affirms that ‘the early comic book field was fundamentally shaped by the formulas, genres, and commercial practices of the pulp field’, from which ‘comic book producers borrowed narrative and illustrations’.¹³ Pulp magazine’s illustrations in particular had a strong influence on both the style of comic book illustrations and the fascination they caused in their readers. Pulp artists created covers characterised by realistic illustrations whose style was later reproduced by comic artists.¹⁴ Moreover, pulp magazines had created an imaginary made of powerful men fighting villains and

Eastern Color starting in 1933. One year later and after a few more comic publications of reprinted material, the same Eastern Color published a 68-page journal to be sold in chain stores for 10 cents: *Famous Funnies*, considered the first modern comic journal. Henry Andrews, ‘Famous Funnies’, *Comics Through Time*, ed. by M. Keith Booker (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), I, pp. 133–135.

¹¹ Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), p. 9.

¹² On *pulps* see Ron Goulart, *Cheap Thrills. An Informal History of Pulp Magazines* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1972).

¹³ Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Pulp artists such as Henry Cruse Murphy and Alex Redmond created illustrations for pulp magazines’ covers with the same realism that can be find in comic book artists such as Siegel and Shuster, and Alex Raymond, for example. See Alex S. Romagnoli, Gian S. Pagnucci, *Enter the Superheroes. American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), in particular p. 6 and ff.

saving beautiful women, which found further expression and success in comic sagas first, and later in the new genre of the superhero adventure.

The influence of pulp magazines is a specifically American feature that cannot be found in Italian comics, highlighting how comics reflected specific cultural backgrounds and responded to the audience's taste.¹⁵ In the America of the Great Depression, superheroes not only embodied what young Americans dreamed of being but, more importantly, also the morals of American society and the Manichean dichotomy that characterised its culture.¹⁶ Characters like Mandrake The Magician (1934), Flash Gordon (1934), The Phantom (1936), and Superman (1938) were all an expression of American values and morals, which were exported to Italy through successful comic magazines, such as *L'Avventuroso* and *Jumbo*.

In spite of all the differences noted above, in the 1930s American and Italian educators reacted in a similar manner to the growth of comics. As in Italy from 1936, in the United States comic strips were perceived as a threat to the education of young children.¹⁷ In 1936, an article by John A. Ryan analysed the effects of comics on children, and on American society in general, asking the question 'are the comics moral?'.¹⁸ In Italy, particularly from 1936, educators and pedagogues accused comics of immorality, judging them unsuitable particularly for *children*, highlighting how in Italy comics were still considered a children's product. As such, when American comics started to feature in Italian children's periodicals at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were altered according to the readership targeted. It was only in the 1930s, and specifically with the publication of *L'Avventuroso*, that the original American comics were published keeping their meaning and key features mostly unchanged, as the following section shows.

2. The development of a modern Italian *fumetto* and the Fascist Regime

¹⁵ The illustrations of pulp magazines and their role in the development of the style of the artists, and the influence they had on the readers' tastes is possibly comparable to the role of the illustrations of popular *romanzi d'appendice* in Italy in the 1920s.

¹⁶ Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, p. 4. American comics were deeply rooted in American culture and identity, described by Gordon as 'revealing reflectors of popular attitudes, tastes, and more [...] holding an enchanted mirror to American society'. Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture*, pp. 8–9.

¹⁷ See section 2.2 of this chapter.

¹⁸ John K. Ryan, 'Are the Comics Moral?', *The Forum*, May 1936, p. 301.

2.1 Il fumetto

The origin of modern comics has been identified by historiography with the first publication of the ‘Yellow Kid’, illustrated by Richard F. Outcault, in the *New York World* on 7 July 1895. In Italy, the comics era conventionally starts thirteen years later, on 27 December 1908, the day the first issue of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* appeared on the newsstands.¹⁹ Due to the lack of Italian cartoonists, from the beginning Italian comic magazines used foreign material, and in its first year of publication, *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* – also known with the nickname of *Corrierino* – featured many American comics.²⁰ Foreign comics were also imitated, beginning Italian versions of American comics such as ‘Nello, bimbo modello’ by Attilio Mussino, an Italian version of ‘Little Nemo’ by Winsor McCay. Moreover, Italian authors were also encouraged to create *Italian* protagonists, such as the popular ‘Signor Bonaventura’ (1917), created by Sergio Tofano in response to the popular strips of the unlucky ‘Happy Hooligan’ drawn by Burr Oppen. Therefore, in the field of comics we can identify a process of Italianisation at the very beginning of the creation of modern Italian comics.

The difference in the origins of American and Italian modern comics lies not only in the date of their appearance on the newsstands, but also in their layout and the readership targeted. In particular, there was a crucial difference in the relationship between images and words, which also affected the readership. Whereas in the United States words and images coexisted in balance, in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular, there was a tendency to keep the focus on words and subordinate images as a mere graphical support, as demonstrated by long captions under each panel of a comic strip. Leonardo Becciu interpreted this European attitude to add written text altering the appearance of American comics as a consequence of its humanist tradition: ‘l’Europa “umanista” non voleva e non poteva neppure accettare l’idea che la “sacra” parola si riducesse al rango di ancella del disegno’.²¹ This negative perception of modern comics and their focus on image had two crucial consequences in Italy. First, comics were seen as exclusively directed to children, used a language specifically created for them and mainly had an

¹⁹ The ‘Yellow Kid’ has been considered the first example of modern comics thanks to Coulton Waugh’s *The Comics* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). According to Gabilliet, this ‘obscured the foreign origins of American comics’, particularly the translation of Töpffer in the Jacksonian period. Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, pp. 293–295.

²⁰ These included ‘Mimmo, Mammola e Medoro’ (‘Buster Brown’ by Outcault), ‘Fortunello’ (‘Happy Hooligan’ created by Frederick Burr Oppen), and ‘Bibi e Bibò’ (‘Katzenjammer Kids’ by Rudolph Dirks).

²¹ Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia*, p. 30.

educational purpose.²² Second, the most characteristic feature of modern comics, the balloon, disappeared and was replaced with ‘poesiole a rima baciata poste in calce ad ogni riquadro disegnato’.²³ These short rhymed captions were not only a substitute for balloons, but they also created a whole new level of narration separate from images.

Comics as a new medium were thus altered in Italy in their main characteristic, with a predominance of narration over illustration. The American comic strips were adapted to the Italian standard – *Italianised* in their structure and language – and conceived as children’s literature.²⁴ It was only in the 1930s that comics took on an independent form of expression in Italy. Leonardo Becciu divides the development of Italian comics in the 1930s into three phases: the ‘British’, the ‘American’ and the ‘autarchic’ phase. As is analysed in the following section, the Fascist regime and its cultural ideology had a direct influence on this development.

2.2 The rise of adventure comics and the Fascist Regime (1925 - 1938)

The Fascist regime had a particular interest in the education of young Italians, who were considered the future of the nation. In February 1925, a meeting of the *Gran Consiglio* stressed the importance of educating the Italian youth, ‘affinché braccio, cuore e mente dei giovani siano preparati a nuove conquiste’.²⁵ As Antonio Gibelli notes:

²² Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1991), pp. 9–39. On the educational use of comics see Ermanno Detti, *Il fumetto fra cultura e scuola* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1984).

²³ Becciu, *Il fumetto*, p. 32. On the topic, it is interesting to recall Italo Calvino’s comment: ‘il sistema dei balloons con le frasi del dialogo non era ancora entrato nell’uso [...] il “Corriere dei Piccoli” ridisegnava i cartoons americani senza balloons, che venivano sostituiti da due o quattro versi sotto ogni cartoon. [...] Quei versi sempliciotti a rime bacciate non fornivano informazioni illuminanti; [...] era chiaro che il versificatore non aveva la minima idea di quel che poteva essere scritto nei balloons dell’originale, perché non capiva l’inglese o perché lavorava su cartoons già ridisegnati e resi muti’, in Italo Calvino, ‘Lezioni americane’, in *Saggi 1945–1985*, ed. by Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), pp. 707–710.

²⁴ On translating comics see *Comics in Translations*. In particular p. 8: ‘When comics are translated, a change of genre, readership, publication format [...] may be involved [...] When American comic strips such as George McManus’ “Bringing Up Father” (translated as “Arcibaldo e Petronilla”) were first published [...] the balloons were deleted and the images retouched, and rhymed sentences narrating the stories were added below each panel, in conformity with Italian drawn stories’.

²⁵ Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, XXI, p. 257.

Le pratiche politiche e culturali di conquista dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza possono essere considerate per molti aspetti come un modello di quelle di manipolazione delle masse. È la nazionalizzazione dell'infanzia come un fattore decisivo della nazionalizzazione delle masse.²⁶

From this point of view, it is clear that the education of children was crucial in the Fascist idea of creating a new Italian nation and people. As Carabba comments, Italian children 'dovevano costituire le basi [...] della nazione futura, guidata dal fascismo verso gloria imperitura'.²⁷ This interest in Italian children's education found expression in the centrality of school reform, and youth organizations, but also in the publication of the first Fascist children's periodical: *Il Giornale del Balilla*, published for the first time on 18 February 1923, just weeks after the March on Rome. The magazine had the same structure of *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* and included comics with rhymed captions and educative columns. However, it had a clear political aim that resulted in comics delivering socio-political messages, such as 'Mimmo Piangimai' – a child who fights against undisciplined children – or 'Fasciolino', a *balilla* committed to the Fascist faith.²⁸ The political aim is also clearly expressed by Dino Grandi's editorial in the first issue:

Il nostro giornale è dedicato ai fanciulli italiani. Questi viventi fiori della nostra razza, educati al ricordo degli eroismi compiuti da quegli altri fanciulli che andarono alla guerra cantando e fermarono l'invasore sul Piave, e all'esempio di quelli che per la seconda volta salvarono l'Italia [...] I nostri Balilla [...] troveranno in queste pagine *l'alimento della loro intelligenza e del loro cuore*. Non si conquista per sempre l'anima della Nazione, se non si cura *l'educazione intellettuale e morale dei fanciulli e dei giovinetti* [...] Per questo, o fanciulli d'Italia, *il Fascismo vi predilige*.²⁹

The creation of *Il Giornale del Balilla*, and a few years later of *La Piccola Italiana*, shows the interest of the Fascist regime in children's periodical press as a means of dissemination of Fascist values and education of Italian children. The intervention of the Fascist regime in comic magazines was part of a general process of fascistisation of the press, and periodicals such as the *Corrierino* or the *Giornalino della Domenica* were forced to adapt their stories to the Fascist

²⁶ Antonio Gibelli, *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla grande guerra a Salò* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 4

²⁷ Carabba, *Il Fascismo a fumetti*, p. 13

²⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁹ *Il Giornale del Balilla*, 12 February 1923, p. 1 (emphasis mine). Quoted in Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti*, p. 19.

propaganda, for example by introducing Fascist protagonists and symbolism that praised Mussolini's Italy.³⁰

The 1930s were characterised by both the introduction in Italy of American adventure comics and an increasing influence of Fascist ideology on comic magazines. In this phase, and before the Fascist regime took an explicit action against them, American comics innovated the Italian exotic imaginary, until then associated with the world created by adventure novelist Emilio Salgari.³¹ Adventure comics were introduced by the weekly *Jumbo*, launched on 17 December 1932. *Jumbo* distanced itself from the model set by the *Corrierino* and marked the beginning of a new era for comic periodicals. It was aimed at young adolescents, representing a first attempt in the field to expand the readership in this direction. The most significant innovations introduced by *Jumbo* were the use of speech bubbles and the publication of adventure comics in weekly episodes, a format until then only used in publications for adults. Although still accompanied by descriptions in captions, the presence of speech bubbles represented a real cultural revolution in the Italian comic press: it marked the first shift from an educational purpose towards a purely entertaining nature of comic magazines. Thanks to the introduction of this new formula, *Jumbo* soon reached 350 000 weekly copies outpacing the *Corrierino*, which was selling about 220 000 copies.³²

Jumbo can be seen as a key representation of the 'British' phase pinpointed by Becciu, as its main stories were adaptations of British comics such as 'Rob the Rover' by Walter H. Booth (Italianised and *fascistizzato* in 'Lucio l'avanguardista') and 'Little Snow Drop' by Frank

³⁰ *Il Giornalino della Domenica* offers a clear example of the educational purpose of children's periodicals well before Fascism. In its first issue, 24 June 1906, it was stated that the journal aimed to 'dare tutte le domeniche al suo giovine pubblico una lettura che sia istruttiva senza stancare l'attenzione; che sia educatrice senza essere noiosa' (emphasis mine). Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti*, pp. 20–25. *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* resisted the pressure of the Fascist regime until 1931, when after the death of Silvio Spaventa Filippi the directorship was taken over by Franco Bianchi. American strips disappeared in favour of Fascist characters such as Romolino e Romoletto, Venturino, Brio, Dado – 'piccoli soldati, devoti e ubbidienti, pronti a incarnare [...] i valori della Fede', Juri Meda, *Stelle e Strips. La stampa a fumetti italiana tra americanismo e antiamericanismo, 1935–1955* (Macerata: EUM, 2007), p. 25.

³¹ Emilio Salgari created the popular character Sandokan, protagonist of many adventure novels such as *Le tigri di Mompracem* (Genoa: Donath, 1900) that started the Malaysian saga. Also famous for his corsair adventures – the Antilles saga that started with *Il Corsaro Nero* (Genoa: Donath, 1904) – Salgari created an exotic world made up of fantastic adventures that influenced entire generations and shaped the Italian adventure literary genre. On Salgari's exoticism in general see Giuseppe Bevilacqua and others, *L'isola non-trovata. Il libro di avventure nel grande e nel piccolo Ottocento* (Milan: Emme Edizioni, 1982).

³² See Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, pp. 98–108. On *Jumbo*, see Gadducci, Leonardo, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, pp. 22–27; Leonardo Gori, *Jumbo, finalmente (1932)* <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/jumbo-finalmente-1932.html>, and *Jumbo - seconda parte* <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/jumbo-seconda-parte.html> [accessed 17 June 2016].

Jennens ('Il segreto del nonno'). 'Lucio l'avanguardista' offers a clear example of Italianisation of foreign comics: the protagonist was renamed and transformed into a *balilla*, the setting changed accordingly, but the substance of the story, an airplane adventure-story, remained the same. In its Italian version, Rob the Rover became an explicit representation of the Fascist regime and its values: the young protagonist, Lucio, is an aviator of a biplane named 'Dux' who in 1936 started a new adventure set in Africa alongside a typical Fascist woman, 'Romana'.³³

Because of these innovative features, *Jumbo* was a pioneering publication in the field of Italian comic periodicals. However, it was still partially anchored to a traditional idea of comics and influenced by the Fascist regime, as demonstrated by the editorial published in its first issue:

JUMBO vuol divertire i propri lettori ed insegnare loro tante belle cose! Le storielle [...] avranno sempre un *fine altamente morale*: saranno una esaltazione delle virtù civili che ogni bimbo italiano deve avere o prepararsi ad avere nell'*esempio fulgidissimo del Re Vittorioso, e sotto la guida del Duce*.³⁴

The publisher Lotario Vecchi, not only adapted the British stories to an Italian readership, and added the traditional captions, but also aligned himself closely with the Fascist regime's ideals by declaring that the main aim was to *educate* its young readers to the highest values of Fascist Italy. It is this final aim of educating its readers that makes *Jumbo* a hybrid between a 'traditional' publication and a revolutionary one. By denying its nature as an entertaining product, Vecchi protected its magazine from Fascist censorship, which was paying increasing attention to the periodical press, as examined in chapter 1.

In 1932, a historically crucial magazine was launched by Nerbini: *Topolino*. The magazine had 8 pages, but featured fewer comics and more stories for children. However, the presence of a cartoon strip with the famous Walt Disney character Mickey Mouse, which in the 1930s reached its peak of popularity in cinemas, guaranteed its success and originality. What is more, *Topolino*'s main and declared aim was to *entertain* its readers, not to educate them:

Questo giornalino non ti promette altro che di farti passare qualche lieto momento, di svagarti un poco, e *non ha la benché minima idea di fare il saputone con te*. Se imparerai qualche cosa, tanto meglio, vuol dire che il giornalino ti avrà insegnato senza farsene accorgere. D'altronde dei maestri ne hai abbastanza.³⁵

³³ On 'Lucio l'avanguardista' and the role of Romana see Sara Zanatta, Samanta Zaghini, Eleonora Guzzetta, *Le donne del fumetto* (Latina: Tunuè, 2009), pp. 37–38.

³⁴ *Jumbo*, 17 December 1932, p. 2 (emphasis mine).

³⁵ *Topolino*, 31 December 1932, quoted in Meda, *Stelle e Strips*, pp. 30–31 (emphasis mine).

The history of *Topolino* has been retraced in *Eccetto Topolino*, but it is important to highlight here how its publication was fundamental for the development of modern comic magazines in Italy. It was because of *Topolino* that Nerbini connected with King Features Syndicate's Italian agent Guglielmo Emanuel, and bought the rights to several American comics, such as 'Tim Tyler's Luck' by Lyman Young ('Cino e Franco').³⁶ During the first year of publication of *Topolino*, Nerbini progressively dedicated more space to images, reducing the text and altering the balance between the two media that until then had been conventional in the comic press:

Dai primi numeri di questo giornalino al presente, ultimo dell'annata, troverete parecchia differenza poiché l'Editore, nell'intendimento di *conformarsi ai gusti dei ragazzi d'oggi* e rendere loro sempre più gradito 'Topolino', lo è andato ricolmando, ognor di più, di vignette e storielle figurate'.³⁷

In Nerbini's view, images were the key to the new medium, which soon became the core of his most successful creation: *L'Avventuroso*.

Earlier in 1934, following the success of *Jumbo*, Vecchi also launched a magazine aimed at adolescents: *L'Audace*. The story of this publication can be taken as a clear example of the evolution of the modern Italian comic magazine, embodying two of the three phases pinpointed by Becciu – the 'British' and 'American' phases – plus an early stage that can be defined as a 'traditional' phase – when the balloons were eliminated and words were dominating the scene. In January 1934, *L'Audace* appeared on the newsstands as a 'traditional' children's magazine in its format and content, only publishing stories in text with no images. This feature made *L'Audace* looking obsolete compared to *Topolino* and *Jumbo*. In August, in order to keep up with the increasing number of comic magazines appearing on the newsstands, Vecchi transformed *L'Audace* introducing comic strips – mainly British material from the Amalgamated Press. However, text still predominated over images, and the differences between British comics and the increasingly popular American adventure comics published in other periodicals still made *L'Audace* look outdated.³⁸ From October 1934, the publication of *L'Avventuroso* pushed Vecchi to change the format and content of *L'Audace* again: from February 1935, captions were

³⁶ In 1934, when Nerbini launched *L'Avventuroso*, all its American comics came from KFS, including Alex Raymond's 'Jungle Jim' and 'Flash Gordon'.

³⁷ Collodi Nipote, *Topolino*, 30 December 1933, quoted in Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, p. 109 (emphasis mine).

³⁸ According to Becciu, British comics were 'troppo lenti e manierati, ed insistevano eccessivamente sulle descrizioni minuziose dei particolari, a scapito dell'azione'. Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia*, p. 78.

removed and substituted by the original speech bubbles, with images finally prevailing over words. Moreover, *L'Audace* offered to its readers unpublished strips of already famous comics such as 'Guido Ventura' ('Brick Bradford' by Clarence Gray and William Ritt), 'L'intrepido Bill' ('Broncho Bill' by Harry F. O'Neill), and 'La Pattuglia Volante' ('Radio Patrol' by Eddie Sullivan and Charlie Schmidt). All these comics had already been published in *I Tre Porcellini*, *Jumbo* and *L'Avventuroso* respectively. However, the existence of *daily strips* and *Sunday pages* in the United States allowed the Italian representative of KFS to sell them separately to different publishers, and Vecchi was thus able to publish original material for *L'Audace*. Furthermore, Vecchi did not rely only on KFS material, but also on material from the United Features Syndicate, ensuring his magazine acquired the first original strips of an unpublished hero, 'Tarzan'.³⁹ In spite of all these efforts, however, *L'Audace* was never able to compete with *L'Avventuroso* and *Topolino*, and by 1938 Vecchi abandoned the project and the magazine ceased publication.

The parabola of *L'Audace* is representative of the dynamism of the Italian comic book industry in the mid-1930s. Comics were becoming so popular that by 1937 the main publishers in the field (Vecchi, Del Duca, Nerbini and Mondadori) were publishing 18 different comic magazines overall, rising to a total of 35 weeklies if we consider also smaller publishing companies.⁴⁰ However, a clear dividing line can be set with the advent of *L'Avventuroso*, after which many comic magazines were issued as an attempt at either joining a successful market or antagonising Nerbini's periodical. Among the latter, *Il Vittorioso*, published by *Azione Cattolica*, represents possibly the most effective attempt to challenge Nerbini's success, particularly for its continuity after the 1938 ban on foreign comics, becoming the longest running comic magazine created in the 1930s.⁴¹ It was a magazine 'allineato al regime e realizzato completamente da sceneggiatori e disegnatori italiani, che trova nella saga di "Romano il legionario", dove si coniuga patriottismo e clericalismo, il suo eroe di maggior successo'.⁴² Also published in

³⁹ It is also interesting to note that Vecchi published the strips without altering their appearance as Nerbini used to do. On *L'Audace* and SAEV see Gori, *L'Audace*, <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/09/laudace.html> [Accessed 03 August 2016]; and Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 51 and ff.

⁴⁰ SAEV published 7 different comic books, followed by Nerbini and Del Duca – Casa Editrice Moderna – (4 publications each) and Mondadori (3). Carabba, *Il Fascismo a fumetti*, p. 31; Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 142.

⁴¹ By publishing only Italian comics, *Il Vittorioso* did not suffer any consequences after 1938. On the contrary, while other publications were struggling to sell, *Il Vittorioso* gained more popularity. See Gori, *Il Vittorioso 1942–43*, <http://annitrenta.blogspot.it/2009/04/il-vittorioso-194243.html> [Accessed 20 December 2016].

⁴² Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 10. See also pp. 139–141.

December 1936 for the first time, *Argentovivo!* was another attempt to counterbalance the predominance of American heroes, but it only lasted for 55 issues, closing one year later. Both magazines published stories written and drawn exclusively by Italian authors and artists and made this feature their point of strength.

In the next section, the Fascist regime's policies on the comics are examined in relation to the general campaign for the cultural autarchy.

2.3 Autarchic comics (1938 - 1942)

In March 1937, Alfieri declared: 'lo scopo del ministero era di garantire che tutto ciò che veniva presentato alle masse [...] fosse governato da "un chiaro e sincero spirito fascista"'.⁴³ The statement found one application in a stricter control over the periodical press, and a series of decrees that limited the freedom it had experienced until then. Comic magazines became subject to specific attention from the Minculpop, and in July 1938 Alfieri took the first clear step against foreign comics, urging comics magazines' publishers to 'far scomparire entro tre mesi ogni soggetto o vignetta d'importazione o d'imitazione americana'.⁴⁴

The campaign against foreign comics specifically targeted American products – the most popular – but a more general critique was launched in a convention on children's literature in 1938. Its manifesto, written by Marinetti, stated that 'la letteratura giovanile deve affrancarsi dai libri stranieri, nocivi alla formazione delle nuove generazioni'.⁴⁵ The convention marked the beginning of the Fascist campaign against foreign contamination of the morals of its youth. Comic magazine publishers soon had to adapt to the new dispositions issued by the Minculpop, which imposed the

Abolizione completa di tutto il materiale d'importazione straniera [...] soppressione di quelle storie e illustrazioni che si ispirano alla produzione straniera. Riduzione a metà delle pagine della parte dedicata alla pura illustrazione con conseguente aumento del testo finora quasi totalmente sacrificato. La stampa per ragazzi dovrà essenzialmente assolvere una funzione educativa, esaltando l'eroismo italiano, soprattutto militare, la razza italiana, la storia passata e presente d'Italia. L'avventura avrà la sua parte, purché sia audace e sana, ripudiando tutto ciò che vi è nelle storie criminali, paradossali, tenebrose e moralmente

⁴³ Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso*, p. 128.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Gori, Gadducci, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 166 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ Quoted in Pino Boero, Carmine De Luca, *La letteratura per l'infanzia* (Rome-Bari: 1995), p. 171

equivocche che inquinano tanta parte della stampa per ragazzi. [...] Tali direttive che hanno [...] un'ispirazione razziale e *autarchica*, dovranno essere attuate completamente entro il mese di dicembre 1938.⁴⁶

A particularly revealing insight into Fascist perceptions of comics at this time can be gleaned from an article in *La Stampa* from December 1938, written by Fascist journalist Giorgio Vecchietti. Vecchietti notes that in 1938 more than 30 comic journals were being published. Among these, at least 5 of them were distributing more than 100.000 copies and around ten were printing between 50 and 80.000 copies:

una tiratura complessiva di circa due milioni e una vendita di un milione e mezzo di copie. Se si calcola che ogni numero passa per le mani di almeno tre ragazzi, se ne conclude che ogni settimana più di tre milioni di piccoli lettori si appassionano, fanno il 'tifo' più appassionato [...] per i loro eroi, di forme e di spiriti non italiani se non addirittura antiitaliani.⁴⁷

The main problem of these comics appears to be their anti-Italian and specifically American features and values, which were admired by more than three million young readers:

Tengono il cartello infatti una settantina di storie in continuazione di genere poliziesco e avventuroso, di pura marca americana, e una quarantina di non meglio accertata derivazione o imitazione 'yankee'. [...] I giornalini dalle grandi tirature non sono scritti ma, quasi diremmo, rozzamente filmati, composti cioè di storie e vignette alla maniera cinematografica americana. [...] Disegnatori e soggettisti impongono così all'attenzione, anzi alla ammirazione del fanciullo italiano un modo di vivere, di pensare, di agire rigidamente americano. Mai propaganda fu operata con tanta ampiezza di mezzi e garanzia di successo. [...] tutto ciò, di grande o minuscolo, su cui il nostro ragazzo posa l'occhio è infallantemente, spietatamente americano. Il suo gusto è ormai *gout americain*, come le sigarette degli snob.⁴⁸

Not only were young Italian adolescents reading American comics and absorbing American values, but even where there were Italian stories, these were emulating foreign products. Moreover, Vecchietti highlights that comics were acting as a means of propaganda for American

⁴⁶ 'Ordinanza del Ministero Cultura Popolare sulla stampa periodica per ragazzi', in *Scuola italiana moderna* (Brescia: La Scuola), 26 November 1938, quoted in Gori, Gadducci, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 187 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁷ Giorgio Vecchietti, 'La rivincita di Pinocchio', *La Stampa*, 28 December 1938.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

values, morals and way of thinking, and spreading negative stereotypes of the Italian race in contrast to a superior 'Anglo-Saxon' type:

Biondo, slanciato, di tipo anglosassone, razzialmente puro è sempre l'eroe, l'invitto; bruno, basso, tozzo, meridionalmente acceso, violento e subdolo è sempre l'antagonista, in tutto simile a quella figura di emigrante latino, o meglio italiano, i cui cineasti di Hollywood amano riservare le parti mortificanti del *villain*.⁴⁹

Five years after the first American adventure comics had arrived in Italy, and four years after the debate against them had started, foreign comics or content inspired by them were finally to be suppressed, and the directives of the Minculpop applied, as Vecchietti proudly declares:

All'alba del 1° gennaio [1939] [...] i giornali per ragazzi, per ordine del Ministro della Cultura popolare, appariranno in veste totalmente, italianamente rinnovata: cadranno le innumerevoli vignette straniere, le pagine scritte equilibreranno quelle di pura illustrazione, le avventure, gli ardimenti, i giochi avranno una marca, un'ispirazione, uno stile finalmente italiani.⁵⁰

Vecchietti's article testifies how American comics were perceived as vehicles of a different culture which was undermining Italian children's education. Pushing back against this, the elimination of foreign content and the resurgence of the predominance of texts over images would bring back the Italian tradition. In other words, Vecchietti and the regime stressed the difference between American and Italian culture, and implicitly sustained the superiority of the latter.⁵¹

As a result, at the end of 1938, American heroes disappeared from *L'Avventuroso*, *L'Audace*, *Jumbo* and the others. However, sometimes the American characters were simply Italianised, their names changed, or the story substituted by Italian versions made by Italian authors. In September 1938, in *Giungla!*, for example, Nerbini changed the main character of the

⁴⁹ Ibid. It is interesting to note how Vecchietti had changed its position. In 1937, in the literary magazine *L'Orto*, rather than abolishing American comics, he suggested Italianising them: 'Il ragazzo non vuole sfilate settimanali di scolari modello, di uomini modello; il ragazzo si annoia e ha ragione. Bisogna piuttosto che Gordon diventi da americano a italiano, da biondo bruno, conservando intatti i suoi attributi di uomo ardito e fiero [...] che quel tanto di buono che è nella stampa americana o americanizzata di oggi, i suoi insegnamenti ed esperienze, non vadano perduti ma convogliati, orientati in senso del tutto italiano, senza preoccupazione di propaganda [...]'. Quoted in Meda, *Stelle e Strip*, pp. 50–51.

⁵⁰ Ibid. The decree also aimed at rebalancing the content of the magazine in favour of written texts.

⁵¹ Vecchietti defines as 'new' the resurgence of traditional Italian children's periodicals, with fewer images and more text; this is perfectly in line with the Fascist idealisation of the past and its ambivalent relationship with modernity.

publication, 'Jungle Jim' by Alex Raymond, with a series of Italian strips such as 'Selvaggi della Guiana', and 'Evasi della Guiana' by Ferdinando Vichi that were clearly inspired by the American hero. In the same year, another Italian hero was created, 'Dick Fulmine' by Carlo Cossio, an Italian-American policeman whose adventures were set in Chicago.⁵² In spite of his Italian origins, the Fascist censors intervened to change some of the features of the hero: his sweater was judged too American and had to be replaced with a more Italian shirt, and his name had to be simply 'Fulmine'. In 1942, Fascist censorship became so restrictive that 'Fulmine' had to have a car crash followed by facial plastic surgery in order to justify a change of his appearance, judged too American by the regime.⁵³

Both Vichi and Cossio created Italian protagonists that emulated well-known American heroes the readers loved. The popularity of the American comics induced Italian authors to reproduce both the American style of the drawings and rhythm of narration. In other words, the success of American comics forced Italian artists to create an Italian version of a new *immaginario* created overseas. By the end of the 1930s, the adventure comics imported from the United States had partially substituted and partially integrated the pre-existent Italian exotic imaginary world created by Salgari, marking a generational change.⁵⁴

After Italy joined the war in 1940, the regime's attention was diverted to the war and the control it exerted over comic magazines briefly decreased, and a few American strips were published again, even if disguised with Italian names: for example, 'Jungle Jim' became 'Geo', and 'Superman' was Italianised to 'Ciclone'. However, in 1941, with Italy and the United States officially at war, the Fascist regime banned once and for all both American comics and balloons, ending the 'golden age' of Italian adventure comics.

3. Adventure comics and entertainment: *L'Avventuroso*

3.1 Nerbini and the creation of *L'Avventuroso*

As mentioned in chapter 1, Giuseppe Nerbini founded his publishing company at the end of the nineteenth century, and by the 1920s, he was publishing popular characters who were part of the

⁵² Dick Fulmine's adventures were published in *Albi dell'Audacia* (Milan: Vittoria, 1938–1939).

⁵³ Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, pp. 120–121. For a general but detailed overview of Fascist censorship of comic books, see Gori, Gadducci, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, pp. 152 and ff.

⁵⁴ See Colombo, *La cultura sottile*, p. 96.

immaginario popolare, such as Buffalo Bill, Lord Lister and Nick Carter, with circulation records of up to 50,000 copies.⁵⁵ These publications highlight both Nerbini's role as a publisher of *popular* characters and stories, and his early interest in overseas productions.

As already discussed in chapter 1, Giuseppe Nerbini and his son Mario – who had joined him in the publishing company mainly supervising the periodical section – had joined the Fascist movement since 1922. Nerbini used his Fascist affiliation to protect his business and have a certain freedom, but the evidence suggests that this was a choice of business that cannot be seen as a form of Fascist support, as much as the publication of American comics cannot be interpreted as a form of resistance.⁵⁶ Just as Mondadori published articles dealing with women in employment in his women's magazine, *Grazia*, as examined in chapter 4, Nerbini published the American heroes which allowed him to sell more copies than any other comic magazine in the 1930s.

Nerbini had been active in the children's periodical press since the beginning, publishing magazines such as *Il Giornale di Fortunello* (1920 – 1922), *Monella* (1925 – 1936) and *L'Avventuriero* (1926); in the 1930s, his comic magazines had a key role in the shaping of the modern Italian comic press. In particular, Mario Nerbini – head of the company from 1933 – after the success of *Topolino*, decided to launch a new project focused on American adventure comics: *L'Avventuroso*.

From documents quoted in *Eccetto Topolino*, it emerges clearly that Mario Nerbini himself had a central role in the shaping and production of *L'Avventuroso*. According to an interview with Francesco De Giacomo, Nerbini supervised the work of artists, writers and, above all, organised the layout of the magazine and approved the translations: 'Volevo fare tutto da me [...] Poi guardavo tutti i giornali, davo i soggetti...insomma facevo tutto da me [...] [Anche] l'impaginazione, [...], andavo nelle tipografie a impaginare, tutto [facevo tutto]'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Listri, *Il mondo di Nerbini*, p. 113 and ff. Nick Carter first appeared in Italy in 1908 (*Nick Carter, il grande poliziotto americano*, Milan: Casa Editrice Americana, 1908) and was published by Nerbini from 1919. It is worth noting that among the illustrators of these booklets there was Giove Toppi, who later had a central role in *L'Avventuroso*.

⁵⁶ Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 10 and p. 27. In an interview with Francesco De Girolamo quoted below, Mario Nerbini also claimed to know personally Mussolini: 'Conoscevo molto bene Mussolini [...] potevo andare quando volevo, da Mussolini'.

⁵⁷ Francesco De Giacomo, 'Nerbini – Firenze', in *Linus*, 12 March 1966, quoted in Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p.p. 392–396. It is not clear who translated the American comics, but as Gori points out, the translations were influenced by the Florentine dialect. See Gori, *L'Avventuroso – 12, 1936* <http://annitrenta.blogspot.it/2011/05/lavventuroso-12-1936-quinta-parte.html> [Accessed 22 December 2016].

There is not much information on how the publishing company and *L'Avventuroso*'s editorial staff were organised; however, looking at Nerbini's collaborators a certain continuity can be noticed: artists such as Corrado Sarri, Tancredi Scarpelli, Guido Moroni-Celsi, Giorgio Scudellari and Giove Toppi had worked with Nerbini illustrating his popular novels. In *L'Avventuroso*, together with other regular illustrators such as Roberto Lemmi, Rudy Coghei, Ferdinando Vichi, Guido and Mario Fantoni, and Carlo Cossio, they created American-style comics. Furthermore, among the regular collaborators there were also writers, among whom it is worth mentioning Paolo Lorenzini – who had directed *Topolino* –, Enrico Novelli (Yambo), Emilio Fancelli and Luigi Motta.⁵⁸ Like in other popular publishing sectors, as discussed in chapter 1 and examined in each case study, it is possible to highlight a network of recurrent names in comic publishing.

The following sections of the chapter retrace and analyse the evolution of *L'Avventuroso*, with particular attention paid to its connections to American comics and the impact of the Fascist censorship. The analysis of the magazine is divided into two parts, the first presenting an overview of *L'Avventuroso*'s content and format in the years 1934 – 1942 (section 3.2), and the second focussing on specific aspects that allow its particular position in relation to its sources and constraints to come into view; the portrayal of women, the translation of American names, and the features of four comic strips that combined American models and modern Italian comics (section 3.3 and 3.4).

3.2 The golden age of American comics in *L'Avventuroso* and Fascist censorship, 1934 – 1942

The golden age of Nerbini was brief, but between 1934 and 1938 it produced several radical innovations in Italian comics, with *L'Avventuroso* at the heart of this moment. After 1938, new constraints meant that the impact of his comics was reduced, and in 1942 *L'Avventuroso* passed to Mondadori before being discontinued in 1943. As *Eccetto Topolino* puts it, '*L'Avventuroso* di Mario Nerbini, fra il 1934 e il 1938, è un fenomeno che travalica l'editoria per ragazzi e assume anzi le proporzioni di un autentico fatto di costume';⁵⁹ and for Meda, 'inaugura un nuovo modo

⁵⁸ Luigi Motta also collaborated with *Omnibus*. See Chapter 3.

⁵⁹ Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 68.

di intrattenere i giovani lettori, niente più monelli e comicità ma eroi coraggiosi e invincibili'.⁶⁰

Journalist Giuseppe Trevisani identifies the revolutionary impact of *L'Avventuroso* in its entertaining nature:

I ragazzi [...] si buttarono su quel foglio che era diverso da quanto era stato fino a quel momento consentito e consigliato loro di leggere. Tutti i loro giornalotti [...] erano stati fino a quel momento edificanti e istruttivi. Questo giornalaccio tutto figure finalmente non insegnava niente [...] era soltanto divertente, nella sua sciagurataggine, nel suo italiano a volte persino sconnesso.⁶¹

For its success and its innovation, *L'Avventuroso* is the key to the 'American revolution' in Italian comics. As already noted above, much research has been carried on this magazine; however, these studies are mainly limited to the innovation of the introduction of American heroes, with little attention paid to whether and how these comics were adapted to the Italian audience, or to whether and how Fascist censorship or indeed the publisher's self-censorship transformed them. In this section, *L'Avventuroso* is analysed focussing in particular on how the magazine changed over the years of its production, highlighting the presence of American models, their genres, style and the impact of the Fascist censorship.

Nerbini published *L'Avventuroso* from 14 October 1934 to 28 February 1943, for a total of 439 issues, before ending its adventure and ceding the magazine to Mondadori, who only published 11 more issues (February - March 1943). *L'Avventuroso* usually comprised of 8 pages, but the number changed over the years (6 in 1936, 10 in 1938, 12 in 1939 and up to 16 in 1943), while the price remained stable at 30 *centesimi* until 1937, when from issue nr 131 the price started to rise: 40 *centesimi* in 1937; 50 *centesimi* in 1938; 60 *centesimi* in 1940; reaching a peak of 120 *centesimi* in 1942, and then 60 *centesimi* again in 1943. Similar to *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, *L'Avventuroso* was released on Sundays – unlike other comic magazines such as *Jumbo*, *L'Intrepido*, and *Il Vittorioso*, which released on Saturdays – the same day of the release of the American *funnies*.

The appearance of *L'Avventuroso* was advertised in the last page of Nerbini's earlier magazine *Topolino* on 14 October 1934. The advertisement claimed that the new journal was 'il più grande settimanale illustrato di avventure', and would publish the first strip of American sci-

⁶⁰ Meda, *Stelle e Strips*, p. 33.

⁶¹ Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 43.

fi hero Flash Gordon. For the very first time, adventure comic strips such as ‘Secret Agent X-9’ (‘Emozionante storia d’audacia e spionaggio’), ‘Radio Patrol’ (‘ardimento, imprese fantastiche ed eroiche’) and ‘Jungle Jim’ (‘Storia di viaggi ed esplorazione nella Jungla [sic] misteriosa’) were to be introduced in Italy. The advertisement also highlighted the presence of ‘300 illustrazioni’, which confirms Nerbini’s commercial focus on images. In the first issue of *L’Avventuroso* images dominate, subverting the traditional structure of the *giornalino* – as set by the *Corrierino* – and all but abolishing games, columns, and short written stories. In other words, almost the entire magazine was dedicated to comic strips.

The same day it was advertised, *L’Avventuroso* appeared on the newsstands showing its first page occupied by Flash Gordon, who soon became the star feature of the magazine. The novelty of the magazine was immediately clear by the introduction of a sci-fi and fantasy hero, who offered to the readers a new exotic imaginary.

As Leonardo Gori writes, starting from its titles, *L’Avventuroso* offered its readers a different *immaginario*, stimulating the same exotic collective imagination powerfully promoted by Salgari’s novels and influenced by Hollywood films:

La testata, [...] è un vero e proprio editoriale: sulla sinistra, un nero, un giallo, un indiano, interpretazioni dei tipi contemporanei proposti da Hollywood. Rappresentano l’alterità minacciosa ma anche affascinante, non sono semplici ‘cattivi’ ma incarnazioni dell’esotico ammaliatore. Sulla destra, al posto di un intrepido ‘avanguardista’ o di un eroico balilla, c’è niente meno che un poliziotto americano! Il ‘buono’ è dunque anch’esso esotico, diverso.⁶²

On the second page, there was a serialised novel by Emilio Fancelli, ‘Filibustieri del gran golfo – grande romanzo d’avventure’, the only page where words dominated; but even there, the presence of two large, elaborate illustrations by Giove Toppi capture the readers’ attention, modernising a traditional feature and drawing attention away from the words.

On p. 3, there was the first strip of ‘Radio Patrol’ (published in the US from 1933 as a daily strip and as a Sunday strip from 1934), the first detective comic to be published in *L’Avventuroso*. As far as translation is concerned, ‘Radio Patrol’ is an interesting example which reveals two contradictory approaches to the original American comic. It is the first comic whose title was not translated in *L’Avventuroso*, suggesting an accurate reproduction of the original

⁶² Gori, *L’Avventuroso 1 (1934)*, <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/lavventuroso-1-1934.html> [accessed 12 October 2016].

comic. However, we can clearly identify a process of *Italianisation* in the translation of the dialogues, from names to the use of the traditional Italian polite form of the ‘voi’. In particular, the name of the two protagonists were slightly changed: policewoman Milly Day became Molli Dal, and the main character’s name passed from Pinky to Pinki – the English ‘y’ thus changed to the Italian ‘i’. Like the other American comics adapted for the magazine, it became a long running series; it was regularly published in *L’Avventuroso* until issue 62 – when it was moved to Nerbini’s other successful comics magazine, *Il giornale di Cino e Franco* – and again from issue 89 to 206 when the series was suspended.⁶³ The story, set in Boston, focuses on the adventures of a team comprised of Sergeant Pat and policewoman Molli Dal, who fight crime in a police patrol car – hence the title of the series –, helped by a child named Pinkerton Jr (known as Pinky). Written by crime reporter Ed Sullivan, and illustrated by Charlie Schmidt, ‘Radio Patrol’ was characterised by the realism of the look and events, which contrasted with *L’Avventuroso*’s sci-fi and fantasy heroes like ‘Flash Gordon’: the investigation team fights crime using their intelligence, and the innovative two-way radio car system, not relying on any superhuman physical strength. The sequence of illustrations has a cinematic look: the events move fast and the sequence of events is intense.

‘Radio Patrol’ was not the only crime comic published in *L’Avventuroso*; it was followed by ‘Agente Segreto X-9’, illustrated by Alex Raymond and written by Dashiell Hammett.⁶⁴ According to Carlo Della Corte, ‘Agente Segreto X-9’ was a straightforward representation of the United States in its roaring Twenties, in particular in the look of the protagonist:

nella prima vignetta [...] indossa una sontuosa vestaglia tipo Grand Hotel, e riceve una telefonata con aria assai poco formale, in una posa spavalda alla Clark Gable [...] Alex Raymond crea il suo eroe prestandogli tutti gli attributi di “bello e dannato”, del personaggio duro e avventuroso, con un fondo di puritana onestà, simile a quella che lega i protagonisti dei coevi racconti di Scott Fitzgerald.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Il giornale di Cino e Franco* (Florence: Nerbini, 1935 – 1938) was named after the popular comic strip ‘Cino e Franco’ (‘Tim Tyler’s luck’ by Lyman Young), firstly published in *Topolino* (19 July 1935). See Gori, *Il Giornale di Cino e Franco – I*, <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/il-giornale-di-cino-e-franco-1.html> [Accessed 06 December 2016].

⁶⁴ Dashiell Hammett was already known to the Italian public and was one of the most popular American authors translated and published in Leo Longanesi’s *Omnibus*. See chapter 3.

⁶⁵ Carlo Della Corte, ‘Introduzione’, in Alex Raymond, *Agente Segreto X-9* (Roma: F.lli Spada Ed., 1967), quoted in *Labirinti dell’apparenza*, ed. by Daniella Iannotta (Cantalupa, Turin: Effatà, 2001), p. 62, footnote 13.

Moreover, ‘Agente Segreto X-9’ offers a clear example of the process of adaptation to more Italian-like names. In particular, it is worth highlighting how names were often not *translated* but *adapted*, keeping an exotic hint as the case of ‘Secret Agent X-9’ shows: the name Dan given to the FBI secret agent does not sound as foreign as the original name, Dexter, but it is still not an Italian name, highlighting *L’Avventuroso*’s exotic appeal.

‘Radio Patrol’ and ‘Agente Segreto X-9’ are characterized by similarly realistic stories inspired by crime news, although the latter is focused on the adventure of a secret agent whose real identity remains unknown. The secrecy of the protagonist’s identity and his charm make ‘Agente Segreto X-9’ similar to a Hollywood crime film, with gangsters with no scruples and beautiful women portrayed as damsels in distress or villains. Like the other American comics in *L’Avventuroso*, these detective stories faithfully reproduced the original format and included speech bubbles.

Following these two American crime comics, which also offer a mix of realistic and genre looks on American cities, the following two pages were occupied by two Italian comics that were still using captions with no trace of speech bubbles: ‘Dal deserto alla jungla [sic]’, an illustrated version of Henrik Sienkiewicz’s novel adapted by Paolo Lorenzini and drawn by Giorgio Scudellari; and ‘Il cacciatore di serpenti’, written and illustrated by Corrado Sarri. Compared to the American comics, the two stories are static and the illustrations are merely decorative, as the action is all in the captions: without reading them, the reader would only have a vague sense of the story. This is especially true for ‘Il cacciatore di serpenti’, which more than a comic strip resembles a short story divided into captions.⁶⁶ The story follows the adventure of two students in Vienna – Franco and Agide – who spend more time drinking, smoking and having fun than preparing their exams, borrowing money from a Jewish usurer, Isaac. To pay their debts, Franco sells to Isaac a golden watch that his grandfather, a famous maritime Captain, had given him before dying. Franco soon finds out that to inherit his grandfather’s assets he needs to follow the instructions engraved inside the watch. It is the beginning of an adventure, as Isaac had sold the watch to a German hunter who had already left the country for India. The two

⁶⁶ Talking about the first issue of *L’Avventuroso*, Del Buono writes: ‘uscì in formato 31x43 e constava di otto pagine: una a colori [...] dedicata alle avventure di Flash Gordon [...], tre pagine in rosa [...], una pagina a colori, l’ottava [...], più quattro pagine in bianco e nero di cui una contenente la prima puntata del romanzo [...] di Emilio Fancelli, i fumetti di Radio Patrol di Charlie Schmidt e due altre ingombrate da prove di fumetti italiani da dimenticare’. Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, p. 111 (emphasis mine).

students and Isaac follow the steps of the hunter, from India to Brazil, among rich women and violent bandits, until the trio finally find the watch. The engraving finally revealed the treasure left from the old Captain to his nephew: the secret of life, ‘Lavoro – Oro – Risparmio’.

The story, in its content, writing style and illustrations, resembles the traditional Italian adventure novels of the nineteenth century, and contrasts with the dynamism and cinematic illustrations of the American comics that preceded it. The same can be said of ‘Dal deserto alla jungla’, although its illustrations are simpler, and closer to the modern comic style. The story follows the adventure of two children of engineers in Suez. The boy and girl are kidnapped by ‘ribelli maomettani’, who offer them their freedom on the condition that they repudiate Catholicism. The children refuse, manage to escape, and live a series of adventures while finding their way back home, from the desert to the jungle. Like ‘Il cacciatore di serpenti’, the story develops in the captions, although the presence of dynamic illustrations makes it easier closer to a modern comic than Scudellari’s story. However, captions are still crucial for the understanding of the plot.

The first issue was closed by another American hero, ‘Jim, l’uomo della jungla’, a strip launched in the US simultaneously with ‘Flash Gordon’, illustrated and written by the same authors, Alex Raymond and Don Moore. Based in South-East Asia, Jim Bradley represents the classic adventure hero – and the white hunter –, the good man fighting against evil, which in the strips is embodied by wild aggressive animals, slave traders or reckless hunters. ‘Jungle Jim’ has all the elements common to the other American comic strips published in *L’Avventuroso*: there is a hero fighting villains, helped by another partner in adventure and, ultimately, in love with a woman whom he saves from dangerous men and/or situations.⁶⁷

‘Jungle Jim’ could not be further in style from the two Italian comics that preceded it: from the attack of a tiger, a fight with a puma and a threatening villain, the readers were caught up in the action of a typical dynamic American adventure comic, in contrasts with the static illustrations and the predominance of words of Scudellari and Sarri’s stories. Jungle Jim was printed in colour, with the same three-colour printing of ‘Agente Segreto X-9’, and ‘Flash

⁶⁷ Like in ‘Mandrake the Magician’, the hero is helped by a native, the Hindu Kolu, who in spite of being crucial for the survival and success of the hero, is a non-white subservient character – like Lothar. See the analysis of ‘Mandrake’ in section 3.4.

Gordon': the three comic strips illustrated by Raymond were the only pages in colour, whereas all the other stories were in black and white.⁶⁸

Overall, in the first 12 issues published in 1934 there were three Italian stories, and four American strips. This balance, and the organisation of the magazine remained the same until March 1935. The first noticeable change comes in issue 21 (3 March 1935), where 'Jim, l'uomo della jungla' is moved to an inner page as Flash Gordon, the most popular hero, occupies both the first and last page. The title of Gordon's story also changed from issue 25 (31 March), from 'La distruzione del mondo' to 'Le avventure di Gordon nell'impero di Min', considered as a second series of the Flash Gordon's saga. The subtitle of the magazine was also modified, in July 1935, from 'Grande settimanale d'avventure' to 'Grande settimanale *per tutti*', thus expanding the readership targeted.⁶⁹ The change of subtitle highlighted how *L'Avventuroso* was not a journal for children, protecting Nerbini from the potential accusation of publishing comics morally harmful to the education of children.⁷⁰ This was in contrast to earlier publications that explicitly targeted young children: for example, *La Piccola Italiana*, which carried the subtitle 'settimanale della giovinetta del Littorio'; or *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, clearly aimed at children; and *Jumbo*, subtitled 'settimanale illustrato per ragazzi'.

The year 1935 was also characterised by two important innovations. First, the introduction of 'Mandrake the Magician' ('Mandrake l'uomo del mistero'), which substituted the 'Dal deserto alla jungla' on p. 6. The publication of Mandrake in 1935 was characterised by the usual, minor alteration of names: Detective Sheldon, and Mandrake's companion Lothar each lose an 'h', becoming 'Seldon' and 'Lotar', whereas in the second story, 'The Hawk' ('Il mistero della casa da giuoco'), the villain Hawk becomes Rawak, and Princess Narda, Daran.⁷¹ The protagonist, Mandrake, is the only one to maintain its original name, at least until 1937, when it was also Italianised into 'Mandrache' and then appeared with the improbable name of 'Mandracke' in 1941.

⁶⁸ The use of three-colour printing, a cheap method to reproduce colours, was introduced by Nerbini and made *L'Avventuroso* easily recognisable.

⁶⁹ *L'Avventuroso*, nr 31, 28 July 1935 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ Nerbini had already refuted these accusations in 1935 in a letter addressed to the *Segreteria particolare del Duce*, in which the publisher claimed that his journals were not aimed at children. See Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, pp. 129–130.

⁷¹ Princess Narda not only had her name changed, but her look was also altered, the image manipulated in order to make her less sensual. Like with Dale Arden, Nerbini changed the clothing of Daran covering her body. See section 3.3.

Second, both ‘Dal deserto alla jungla’, and ‘Il cacciatore di serpenti’ adopted balloons, abolishing the captions and marking the end of the ‘traditional’ Italian comic style in *L’Avventuroso* – at least until 1938 when the Fascist regime banned American comics and their features, balloons included. Many other Italian comic strips found space in *L’Avventuroso* in 1935, increasing the number of Italian authors:

- ‘Lo spettro di Stoccolma’ (Sarri)
- ‘Il richiamo della jungla’ (illustrated by Scudellari and written by Fancelli)
- ‘I naufraghi dell’Anna Maria’ (Scudellari)
- ‘Il Leone Bianco’ (Scudellari) – a comic clearly inspired by Jungle Jim
- ‘Il Negriero’ (the debut of Guido Moroni Celsi in *L’Avventuroso*) – a Western comic that recalls the stories of Emilio Salgari
- ‘La prigioniera del Ras’ (illustrated by Moroni Celsi and written by Fancelli) – the first comics of propaganda ever published on *L’Avventuroso*⁷²
- ‘La regina dei pirati’ (Toppi)
- ‘Una donna a bordo’ (Toppi)
- ‘Il dramma del sottomarino H-47’ (Toppi);
- ‘La strana fine di Eddie Parker’ (Gaetano Vitelli);
- ‘La fede degli Avi’ (Vitelli);
- ‘La valigia dei diamanti’ (Carlo Cossio).

A few features of this list stand out. First, the number of Italian comics published in *L’Avventuroso* in 1935 increased; second, considering the overall number of Italian stories published throughout the year compared to the American strips, the Italian comics appear shorter; third, from 1935 on, war enters in *L’Avventuroso* (‘La prigioniera del Ras’, ‘Il dramma del sottomarino H-47’) and with it, Fascist rhetoric. ‘La prigioniera del Ras’ is clear propaganda against the Ethiopians. The story follows the adventure of two 14-year-old Italian boys in Africa – ‘figli di ingegneri [...] amici per la pelle’ – captured by Abyssinians. Both the story and the language used show how *L’Avventuroso* had partially adapted to the Fascist regime’s directive,

⁷² The Fascist regime launched its war against Ethiopia on 3 October 1935; ‘La prigioniera del Ras’ was published from issue 49, 15 September 1935.

which in summer 1935 made its first official reprimand to comic magazines.⁷³ Particularly striking is one of the protagonists' comments, 'quest'*animale* c'ha fatto smarrire' referring to an Abyssinian,⁷⁴ and the iconographic image of the white woman captured, her life threatened by Ethiopians. What is more, the two young protagonists resemble classic Fascist characters, protagonists of comic stories like those published in *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* after 1931: young and brave *balilla* who glorify Fascism and its values. Nonetheless, in spite of a Fascist influence on the themes of the stories, in his comic 'Il dramma del sottomarino H-47', analysed in section 3.4 below, Toppi uses foreign names for his protagonists, such as James Watson, Cherie, Karl, and Marton.

The submarine story ends on 12 January 1936 (issue 66),⁷⁵ and is followed by another story illustrated by Toppi and written by Fancelli: 'I naufragatori misteriosi' (19 January, issue 67). More importantly, from issue 69 (2 February 1936), Jungle Jim – now 'Le avventure di Jim – L'idolo della Jungla' – moves to page 5, leaving the last page of *L'Avventuroso* to Toppi's comic, a page as important as the first one, as these were the pages exposed in the newsstands. However, the fact that there is now an Italian story ending the issues of *L'Avventuroso* does not bring any discontinuity to the style of the magazine. As a matter of fact, Toppi's protagonists are mostly American or British: 'capitano Hearnly della polizia americana', 'comandante Simon' and 'il celebre Land di Scotland Yard e già agente dell'Intelligence service'.⁷⁶ What is more, the style of the illustrations, and the sequence of the actions, particularly its dynamism, make this comic closer to an American strip than any other Italian comics that preceded it. Toppi's following story, 'La regina d'Atalanta', confirms the adoption of an American style by the Italian illustrator, as shown in detail in section 3.4 of this chapter.

Toppi was not the only Italian author inspired by an American imaginary. Among the other Italian comic strips, it is worth mentioning Vichi's 'Uragano di fuoco', a Western-inspired story; Moroni Celsi's 'Il tesoro degli indiani Lupai', which had the same Western setting but, like his other stories, still used captions more than balloons; and, finally, 'I demoni del West' by Raffaello Donati, set in America in 1862 and based on a violent revolt of Cheyennes, Apaches

⁷³ Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti*, pp. 29 - 30.

⁷⁴ 'La prigioniera del Ras', *L'Avventuroso*, 15 September 1935, p. 8 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁵ In the same issues another story by Giove Toppi ends: 'Una donna a bordo – episodio della rivoluzione messicana'.

⁷⁶ 'I naufragatori misteriosi', *L'Avventuroso*, 19 January 1936, p. 5.

and Sioux, subdued by American volunteers, among whom is the hero of the comic 'cacciatore Sure Shot, colpo di fucile sicuro'.⁷⁷ In the second year of publication of *L'Avventuroso*, thus, a process of the Americanisation of Italian comics can be clearly seen in the adoption of the American model in illustrations, dynamism, setting of the stories, and protagonists.⁷⁸

The year 1936 is especially significant also for the appearance of two new comics: 'Red Barry' by Will Gould and, more importantly, 'The Phantom' by Lee Falk.

'Red Barry' was already known to the Italian public with the name 'Jim il Rosso', as its daily strips were published in *La Risata*.⁷⁹ Nerbini, however, was able to buy from KFS the rights to the *Sundays*, and published them under a new name: 'Bob Star, poliziotto dai capelli rossi'. 'Bob Star' is an undercover policeman who often infiltrates criminal organisations to fight gangsters and solve crimes, such as the kidnapping of a boy – Ouchy Mugouchy, Italianised to Occi-Mucci – who helps Red Barry, assuming a role similar to Pinky in 'Radio Patrol'. Unlike the other popular detective comics published in *L'Avventuroso*, such as 'Radio Patrol' and 'Agente Segreto X-9', 'Bob Star' does not have realistic illustrations, and the rhythm of the stories is intense and full of twists. Moreover, the task of Red Barry as an infiltrator keeps the tension high throughout the story, whereas the prominent role of children – such as Ouchy Mugouchy – makes it possible for the young readers to identify with the characters. Another interesting difference between 'Bob Star' and the other crime comics published in *L'Avventuroso* is the role of women, completely absent in the first episode of the saga and marginal in the following episodes, 'Un terzetto eccezionale' published from 23 May 1937 (issue 137).⁸⁰

The major novelty of 1936 appears on issue 101 (13 September): 'The Phantom' ('L'Uomo mascherato'). The colouring of the hero's costume, red, offers an interesting example

⁷⁷ 'I demoni del West', *L'Avventuroso*, 10 May 1936, p.2.

⁷⁸ In these stories the authors provide precise settings. In 'Il tesoro degli indiani Lupai', for example, in the second episode (26 January 1936), the three protagonists – Lucker (a professor), and his son and daughter Harry and Ellen – embark on an adventure to find a hidden treasure located in 'Gran Cañon' [sic] from 'S. Francisco'. The three of them take the transpacific train directed to 'Peach springs', where they find Mexicans, Cowboys and Indians, among whom Harry finds 'Kid West', who becomes another protagonist of the search for the treasure. Although characters and settings are American, the drawing style of Moroni-Celsi is still static and less dynamic compared to, for example, Toppi's style.

⁷⁹ On *La Risata* see Gori, *La Risata - La folgore*, <http://annitrenta.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/la-risata-la-fologre-1.html> [Accessed 14 October 2016].

⁸⁰ In 1936, when 'Bob Star' appeared for the first time in *L'Avventuroso*, the signature of the author – Will Gould – appeared in the corner of the panels as in the original version. However, in 1937, when Nerbini published the episode 'Un terzetto eccezionale', the signature and any other copyright information disappeared, as in the other American comics. 1937 is also the year in which Mandrake is Italianised to Mandrache, and Bob Star's alterations seems to confirm Nerbini's trend of toning down the American origin of the comics published.

of Nerbini's manipulation of the original strips. It has been suggested that Nerbini changed the colour of The Phantom's costume to red, as it was a 'colore più mediterraneamente adatto alla fantasia italiana',⁸¹ but not only there is no evidence in support of this claim, but back in 1936 'The Phantom' was published in the United States as a daily strip and, as such, it was printed in black and white. It seems more likely that the choice of the colour red came about because red was the colour of Flash Gordon's suit, and therefore it could easily associate the new hero with the most successful protagonist of *L'Avventuroso*.⁸² After a few issues, on 6 December 1936, 'The Phantom' begins to occupy the last page. This comic, for its content and language, demonstrates once more how *L'Avventuroso* targeted a wider range of readers compared to other comic magazines such as *Il Corrierino*, *Il Vittorioso*, and *L'Intrepido*; the romance between the two protagonists, Diana and The Phantom, is clear, making it appealing also to a feminine readership, whereas the language is quite strong and not suitable for young children.⁸³

As far as translation is concerned, 'The Phantom' was Italianised as 'L'uomo mascherato', and his girlfriend's name changed from Diana Palmer to Diana Palmesi, eliminating any hint at American names.

In 1936, the publication of written short stories was reintroduced on p. 2, from issue 90 (28 June). However, unlike in 1934, the stories are at first short, and end in the same issue; the genre varies, from a detective story ('Un'avventura dell'ispettore Clark' by Gino Francia) to a 'novella orientale' by Luigi Motta (05 July). From issue 105 (11 October), p. 2 is dedicated again to a serialised novel, a sci-fi novel by Paolo Lorenzini, each episode accompanied by one or two illustrations by Vichi. By the end of 1936, *L'Avventuroso* looked more similar to its appearance in 1934. The look and content of the magazine remained consistent throughout the following year, although in 1937 Mandrake is Italianised in 'Mandrache' and Nerbini, for the first time, published a statement defending his magazine. On 24 January (issue 120, the third of the year), framed on the top right of p. 2, there appears a short statement stating that *L'Avventuroso* is not a magazine for children:

⁸¹ Listri, *Il mondo di Nerbini*, p. 200.

⁸² 'The Phantom' was published in colour for the first time in America in May 1939, when the first Sunday series came out. The colour of his costume was purple-grey.

⁸³ In the very first strip, Diana is portrayed boxing, and a few panels later — still in her boxing clothes — she meets two villains who call her 'gattina'. A couple of issues later, the romance between The Phantom and Diana is made clear. Although 'Flash Gordon' also has clear elements of romance, in 'The Phantom' the romantic relationship between the hero and Diana is explicit from the beginning.

non è un giornale per bambini ma per tutti e *in special modo per giovanetti e signorine*. La nostra Casa ha dedicato ai piccoli lettori “Il piccolo avventuroso” e “Il giornale di Cino e Franco”. Non ci stancheremo di ripeterlo finché ci saranno sordi in giro....⁸⁴

The statement is not signed, but it is plausible that the author is Nerbini himself – ‘la nostra Casa’ –, defending his magazine from the accusation that, as implicitly emerges from the statement, *L’Avventuroso* was publishing material unsuitable for children.

From the first issue of 1937, *L’Avventuroso* had 10 pages and American stories took up even more space than previously. Two new stories of Flash Gordon appeared (‘Verso l’ignoto’ and, from 20 June, ‘Il re della foresta’), two pages dedicated to ‘L’Uomo mascherato – Nel regno dei Singh’, ‘Radio Pattuglia’, ‘Agente segreto X-9’, ‘Bob Star – Un terzetto eccezionale’ (p. 10 - the last page, from 23 May), and Mandrake (now ‘Mandrache il mago benefico’). Thus 7 pages out of 10 were taken up by American comics. The remaining three pages contained Italian stories, the serialised novel and two comics. As before, the Italian comics had an exotic setting, and included Marco Spada and Giove Toppi’s ‘Gente Nostra’, set in South America and following the adventures of ‘Lola Ardito puro sangue sardo figlia di due emigranti italiani residenti nel Sud del Messico’.⁸⁵ A similar story had been published in April, ‘Pionieri italiani “sentieri di guerra” del Grand-Ovest’, which followed the adventures of Giulio Santoro, an emigrant in Nebraska.

It is interesting to note how, through the theme of emigration, Italian artists *Italianised* exotic scenarios and put Italian protagonists among Cowboys and Indians. Rather than alter the American stories by adding Italian features, Italian comics were adapted to the new Americanised *immaginario* of young adults.⁸⁶ In these Italian comics it is possible to find different myths in one single story: the myth of the Italian emigrant in America, and the myth of America itself, with its adventures, its frontier and its promised land and fortune.⁸⁷ However, the setting of these stories is also consistent with the Fascist regime’s censorship on crime news: Italy had to look peaceful and ordered, while crime and violence suited the American cities and confirmed the anti-American idea that linked American society with violence, as examined in

⁸⁴ *L’Avventuroso*, 24 January 1937, p. 2 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁵ ‘Gente Nostra’, *L’Avventuroso*, 30 May 1937, p. 9.

⁸⁶ The success of the American formula is confirmed by the creation of characters like Dick Fulmine (Carlo Cossio, in *L’Audace*, 1938) and Kit Carson (Rino Albertarelli, *Topolino*, 1936).

⁸⁷ See Giulio Cesare Cuccolini, ‘L’Americanismo de *L’Avventuroso* & Co’, in *Dick Fulmine. L’avventura e le avventure di un eroe italiano*, ed. by Gianni Bono and Leonardi Gori (Milan: Motta, 1997), in particular p. 20.

chapter 1 and explored in the following chapter on *Omnibus*. In other words, the American setting of Italian comics satisfied both the readers' expectations and the regime's propaganda.

However, showing the violence of American society did not protect American comics, and the 1938 ban on foreign comics deeply impacted on Italian comic magazines. The first impact of the new legislation on *L'Avventuroso* can be dated to February 1938, when Nerbini rejected a new KFS comic, 'Inspector Wade' (by Lyman Anderson), as shown by a letter Nerbini wrote to Emanuel, the KFS agent in Italy: 'Per l'Ispettore Wade, lo prenderei, ma purtroppo è stata ripresa una forte campagna contro la merce americana'.⁸⁸ From March, Nerbini was forced to send all the translations of the American comics to the *Prefettura di Roma*, to approve publication. However, during the first six months of the year, until issue 205, there were few changes apparent in the magazine. Gordon still lead on the first page with 'Verso l'ignoto' (started in 1937), and then with three more stories: 'Il re della foresta', 'La setta degli straccioni' and 'Gordon prigioniero di Ming', his last adventure ever to be published in *L'Avventuroso*. As already anticipated, the series was abruptly interrupted on 11 September 1938 (issue 206), the deepest change in the history of *L'Avventuroso*: from a modern publication steeped in American comics, it shifted from that moment towards a more traditional Italian magazine in which, gradually, words started to prevail over images. This change is aesthetically preceded and marked by an important remodelling of the heading, where, on the right side, the figure of an American policeman is substituted with a Fascist policeman of the AOI.

The new focus on Italian conquests in Africa was confirmed by issue 207 (25 September) – the first issue without Gordon – in which the first page is occupied by Toppi's 'I tre di Macallè', a colonial adventure based on Edilio Napoli's novel on the first Abyssinian war (1895-1896). A banner at the end of the page gives hope to readers of an imminent return of Gordon: 'Riuscirà lo scienziato italiano Zarro a rendere la vita a Gordon? Lo saprete tra breve'.⁸⁹ The same banner appeared at the end of issue 209, demonstrating not only that Nerbini still hoped to be able to publish Gordon's adventure in the future, but also that he knew the importance of American comics for the success of his magazine. Two issues later, on 23 October 1938 a banner advertised the forthcoming publication of 'Il miracolo di Zarro', which never appeared. The

⁸⁸ Quoted in Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 162.

⁸⁹ *L'Avventuroso*, 25 November 1938, p. 1. In the Italian version published in *L'Avventuroso*, Zarro – Zarkov in the original strips – is Italian; this is an important detail that demonstrates how the American comics were adapted to the Italian audience, making it possible for readers to identify themselves with the characters.

deadline of three months given by the Minculpop to all comic publishers had passed, and *L'Avventuroso* had to comply with the new legislation:

Il nostro periodico ha eliminato gradualmente dalle sue pagine quasi tutte le illustrazioni di produzione americana: attualmente solo due pagine su dodici sono occupate da opere di artisti non italiani, MA ANCHE QUESTE SCOMPARIRANNO AL TERMINE DEGLI EPISODI IN CORSO.

Siamo sicuri che i nostri lettori apprezzeranno questa nostra innovazione a favore della battaglia autarchica nel campo dei periodici di letteratura ricreativa e che l'accoglieranno con la maggior simpatia senza nostalgie per autori e personaggi scomparsi o destinati a scomparire. [...] GIORNALI ITALIANI A LETTORI ITALIANI, ecco quello che dobbiamo realizzare in pieno! Per nostro conto rispondiamo PRESENTE e, ripetiamo, al termine degli episodi in corso sospenderemo anche la pubblicazione delle due ultime storie d'importazione, e cioè «Tra i pirati cinesi» ['Terry and the Pirates'] e «I fuori-legge dell'Oceano» ['The Phantom'].⁹⁰

The marked success of *L'Avventuroso* since the publication of its first issue was linked to the presence of American comics, and their disappearance was not welcomed by its readers. Not only did the readers not appreciate the 'innovazione a favore della battaglia autarchica', but they complained to Nerbini to such an extent that the publisher openly responded to them with another letter only four issues later (issue 219, 18 December):

Ai nostri lettori. In risposta alle molte lettere, non sempre....cortesi che riceviamo da qualche tempo, in seguito a modificazioni, variazioni, soppressioni verificate nei nostri periodici, riportiamo qui sotto le norme emanate dal Ministero della Cultura Popolare, norme a cui devono uniformarsi tutti i giornali dedicati alla gioventù italiana.

Abolizione completa di tutto il materiale di importazione straniera.... Soppressione di quelle storie e illustrazioni che si ispirano alla produzione straniera; Riduzione alla metà delle pagine per la parte dedicata alla pura illustrazione on conseguente aumento del testo, finora quasi totalmente sacrificato....

Questo per nostra giustificazione. Altre ne seguono che in special modo ci riguardano, e alle quali ci atterremo con scrupolo e con disciplina fascista, nella piena certezza di poter riuscire in miglior modo a soddisfare i nostri lettori che ci serberanno la loro cara amicizia.⁹¹

⁹⁰ L'Editore, 'Ai lettori', *L'Avventuroso*, 20 November 1938, p. 2. The statement is clearly both a justification to the readers ('innovazione a favore della battaglia autarchica nel campo dei periodici') and a reiteration of Fascist faith ('rispondiamo PRESENTE', echoing the Fascist ritual of 'l'appello').

⁹¹ *L'Avventuroso*, 18 December 1938, p. 3 (emphasis in original).

From December 1938, the transformation of *L'Avventuroso* according to the new Fascist directives was finalised: comics were surrounded by text, which now occupied most of the space. Compared to the first years of the magazine, the only element of the final issues of 1938 that makes *L'Avventuroso* recognisable is the three-colour printing. In issue 219, which marks the beginning of the 'Fascist phase', and whose analysis shows the deep changes in content and format of the magazine, a banner at the end of p.1 sponsors 'interessanti, divertenti e istruttive rubriche'.⁹² The new columns, which surround the comic strips, are mainly focused on Italian greatness, as the beginning of the first new section on p. 3, 'Scoperte e invenzioni', demonstrates: 'Una nuova scoperta, che renderà assai facile e alla portata di tutti la guida dell'automobile, è dovuta al *genio italiano*, che mostra la sua bravura anche nel campo strettamente tecnico'.⁹³ With the exception of a column on general knowledge and curiosities – in this issue 'Le foglie hanno gli occhi', on the movement of leaves towards the sunlight (p. 3) – the main focus of these sections were Fascist heroes, such as in the column 'Eroi dell'Italia Imperiale' (in this issue dedicated to Padre Reginaldo Giuliani, whose story was told in a column on p. 4), and Italian historical personalities (such as Benvenuto Cellini, whose life and merits were described in a piece occupying the whole of p. 5). A column on pp. 8-9, 'Ludi e Ardimenti', framed two Italian comic strips and was dedicated to sport – in this case a short story on the victory of an Italian team in a motor racing world championship; on p. 10 a column titled 'Il valore italiano' highlighting the heroism of Italian soldiers who died in World War I and of their proud mothers. Overall, the issue contained a total of 12 pages, of which only 4 were entirely occupied by comic strips ('I tre di Macallè', p.1; 'La regina di Cipro', p. 6; 'L'Uomo Mascherato', p. 7; 'La capanna del Gran Paradiso', p. 12), and 2 by text (a short story on p. 2 and the life of Benvenuto Cellini on p. 5); the other 6 pages had adopted the new formula of a comic strip framed by text.

The recurrent columns introduced in this phase were: 'Varietà', published for the first time in issue 200 (7 August 1938), on a variety of different topics, from flying mammals (issue 213) to trained fish (issue 220); 'Curiosità scientifiche' and 'Avvenimenti curiosi e straordinari', both similar to 'Varietà'; and 'I grandi avventurosi' (from issue 220), which in some issues substituted 'Eroi dell'Italia imperiale'.

⁹² Ibid., p. 1 (emphasis mine).

⁹³ Teodosio Da Sepino, 'Invenzioni e scoperte', *ibid.*, p. 3 (emphasis mine).

In December 1938, the only American hero that survived was 'L'Uomo Mascherato', whose adventure were published for the last time on 31 December 1938 (issue 221). *L'Avventuroso's* Fascist phase did not only affect the balance between text and images, and between Italian and American comics, but also the content of the Italian comics. In 1938, some comics were explicitly aligned with Fascist policy, such as 'Jutso il piccolo eroe giapponese' (Gaetano Vitelli), and 'Agli ordini di Franco' (Mario Tempesti). However, some of the Italian comics were clearly inspired by the American heroes that preceded them, for example 'Gaor, il conquistatore del fuoco' (Guido Fantoni), which recalls 'Tarzan', and the series of 'L'ispettore Petrosino' (Vichi) – based on the life of the real Italian-American policeman 'Joe' Petrosino – whose style and setting remind us of 'Radio Patrol' but whose content reflects the *leggi razziali* in the representation of the villain, Mont Eastman, portrayed according to the iconography of the Fascist anti-Semitic propaganda.

The new format remained consistent throughout the following years. In 1939, text and images were divided, with pages entirely dedicated either to comics or to written sections. Text was no longer used to frame comics, and the magazine was now harmoniously divided into 6 pages dedicated to comics, and 6 to written sections. The regular columns consistently followed the pattern set by issue 219, with an historical Italian personality introduced in each issue and many sections celebrating Italian – and Fascist – achievements. Moreover, from issue 233 (26 March 1939), the description of the magazine changed again: from 'Grande settimanale per tutti' to 'Grande settimanale a colori'. Although the new layout remained consistent throughout the final years of *L'Avventuroso*, in 1940 a series of events moved the Fascist regime's attention away from comic magazines for a period: in May, Alfieri declared that the purification of children's press from any foreign contamination had been concluded; in June, Italy entered the war; and in October Alfieri was substituted by Alessandro Pavolini as Minister of the Minculpop. These events resulted in a relatively greater freedom for *L'Avventuroso*, and after June, Nerbini reintroduced some American heroes: the already mentioned Italian versions of 'The Phantom' illustrated by Lemmi ('Giustiziere Mascherato', issues 271–332, 1940; 'Uomo Misterioso', issues 378 - 388, 1942); 'Jungle Jim' by Toppi e Nicolà Coghei ('Geo', issues 291–349, 1940–41) 'Brick Bradford' ('Marco Spada', issues 351–379, 1941; 'La corona d'oro', issues 380–382, 1942); and 'Lone Ranger' ('Il solitario della foresta', issues 259–300, 1940). More importantly, one of the symbols of *L'Avventuroso* was reintroduced: Mandrake, who

appeared in a story titled ‘Il mago ‘900’, from issue 301 until 31 December 1941 (issue 375). In February 1941, even ‘The Phantom’ reappeared in its original version by Falk and Moore (issues 333–377). Nonetheless, the number of copies sold never reached the numbers of the golden age: in 1940, *L’Avventuroso* sold a maximum of 100,000. It has been suggested that among the reasons of the poor sales of *L’Avventuroso* in 1940–1941, in spite of the reintroduction of some American heroes, are the absence of Flash Gordon, the star of the magazine, and the predictable plots of comics that were not a novelty anymore.⁹⁴ Although this interpretation seems valid, it has to be taken into account also the impact of the war on Italian families and everyday life, which seems a solid reason for a drop in number of copies sold. Moreover, Nerbini was cautious in the choice and publication of American strips, and although he considered republishing Gordon under the name of ‘Astro’, he decided not to in order to avoid Fascist censorship, as a letter to Emanuel shows:

Dalla lettura delle didascalie [di Gordon] mi sono convinto che il lavoro non è adatto per un giornale per ragazzi. Manca la trama avvincente e si ha una successione di fatti che interessano soltanto per una figurazione sensuale in cui si rappresenta una continua lotta fra esseri umani e non umani per il possesso di belle femmine più o meno vestite. Anche a ricoprirle con maglie figurate e allungamento di veli le forme restano sempre di apparenti nudità. È impossibile poi cambiare certe situazioni che appaiono scabrose. Data la vigilanza che esercita sul nostro giornale il Ministero, ritengo che questo Gordon anche modificato [...] non si accettato. Mi dispiace perché ci contavo molto per una maggiore vendita dell’*Avventuroso*, ma non voglio rischiare troppo.⁹⁵

In the same letter, it emerges that the Fascist regime was still monitoring comic magazines and was particularly interested in keeping the balance between images and words in favour of the latter, as demonstrated by a letter from the Minculpop that Nerbini forwarded to Emanuel: ‘questo Ministero segnala a codesta Casa Editrice l’opportunità di aumentare – gradualmente – le pagine di testo del giornale per ragazzi “*Avventuroso*”’.⁹⁶

Nerbini, with the help of Emanuel, altered the American heroes and their adventures to avoid the Fascist censorship. For example, in Brick Bradford’s comic, published in 1941 as ‘Marco Spada’, the villain, originally from Tripoli, was planned to become ‘di Tunisi o del

⁹⁴ Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, pp. 228–229 and p. 232.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 237.

⁹⁶ *Direzione Generale per il Servizio della Stampa Italiana, protocollo n° 1948/B* quoted in *ibid.* (emphasis in original).

Marocco per ragioni di opportunità'.⁹⁷ A similar change happened to Mandrake, who in the episode 'Nel covo delle belve' (issues 355–375, July–December 1941) rather than fighting Nazi spies in the United States finds himself in Germany, working with the Gestapo against Anglo-Saxon spies.⁹⁸

At the end of 1941, the Minculpop reaffirmed its commitment against the 'americanizzazione attuata attraverso la riproduzione di tavole illustrative e importate, o pedissequamente imitate da quelle straniere'.⁹⁹ On 15 October the ministry imposed on the publishers of comic magazines the requirement for authorisation of the *Prefettura* before distributing the magazines:

Poiché alcuni editori di albi per ragazzi [...] pubblicano ugualmente quegli albi alla cui diffusione il Ministero ha negato l'autorizzazione, prima di procedere alla distribuzione [...] dovranno ottenere [...] il visto della rispettiva Prefettura.¹⁰⁰

It was the beginning of a new phase of stricter control that reached its peak in 1942, when the Minculpop banned again American heroes and, in general, American models. Speech balloons disappeared and the model of the comic strip divided into panels was also abolished.¹⁰¹ The golden age of American comics in Italy, which peaked in the years 1934–1938, had come to an end, and modern Italian *fumetti* based on the American model would only reappear after the end of the war.

As for *L'Avventuroso*, the reintroduction of American comics did not alter the structure of the magazine introduced in 1939, which remained consistent until the beginning of 1943, when Nerbini sold *L'Avventuroso* to Mondadori, who published 10 more issues before suspending its publication (issue 450).¹⁰²

In the following section, the image of women as portrayed in both American and Italian comics published in *L'Avventuroso* is examined to analyse in detail the impact of foreign models on Italian comics, from both a visual and substantial point of view; to examine to what extent did

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 307–308; Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia*, p. 118.

⁹⁹ Gadducci, Gori, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 312.

¹⁰⁰ *Circolare ministeriale*, 15 October 1941, quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 312–319.

¹⁰² *L'Avventuroso*'s issues published by Mondadori slightly changed the appearance of the magazine: the heading, disappeared, but the colour of the tile – red on a yellow background – remained consistent. The last seven issues of *L'Avventuroso* were published as part of *Topolino*.

these models shape Italian comic culture, and how American comics and Fascist censorship conditioned *L'Avventuroso*'s portrayal of women.

3.3 *L'Avventuroso* and the image of women

At the beginning of the twentieth century, *Il Corrierino* introduced to its readers not only to the new model of American comics, but also a different model of femininity. Characters like Maggie/Petronilla ('Bringing Up Father'), and Lola/Toots ('Toots and Casper') mainly represented women as wives, who had a central role in the comics as protagonists in the domestic sphere. Although Petronilla (Maggie), for example, is a strong character and has a central role in the comic strip, she is just a wife – perhaps impetuous, but still a wife that runs the household. In other words, female characters in early American family comics were disseminating a model of femininity 'prevalentemente infantile e matriarcale'.¹⁰³ The role of women as the cornerstone of family life was also reproduced in Italian comics published in children's periodicals, with American family comic strips' character becoming a model for the Italian illustrators. This represents another process of the Americanisation of Italian comics, and Italianisation of American models: Petronilla was taken as a model for Italian comics such as 'Sor Pampurio' (Carlo Bisi, 1928), who with his wife Donna Pampuria represented the typical Italian middle class family, and reproduced the dynamics between Arcibaldo and Petronilla.¹⁰⁴ However, whereas Arcibaldo e Petronilla aimed to improve their social status, Sor Pampurio and Donna Pampuria aimed at stability, highlighting the differences between American and Italian society, and confirming the role of comics as a medium that reflects a culture's social and cultural habits.

At the end of the 1920s, and throughout the 1930s, the Fascist regime used comics to disseminate the image of the young, brave, and good Fascist girl, with comics aimed at young children that highlighted Fascist values such as motherhood, the central role of family and, above all, the complete embracement of the Fascist faith. The editorial opening the first issue of *La piccola italiana*, for example, states that the magazine aims to educate future Italian women:

¹⁰³ Zanatta, Zaghini, Guzzetta, *Le donne del fumetto*, pp. 19 and ff.

¹⁰⁴ Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti*, p. 62; Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia*, p. 187.

‘buone operose ferventi cittadine dell’Italia nuova che, riconsacrata dall’amore dei suoi figli, marcia sicura verso le sue maggiori fortune’.¹⁰⁵

With the publication of adventure comics such as *L’Avventuroso*, both the representation of women and their relationship with male protagonists changed, introducing a different model of femininity. In the American comics published in *L’Avventuroso*, the female characters were portrayed as sensual women, with a protagonist role alongside the male hero, and their appearance resembled those of 1930s Hollywood stars. These female characters offer significant examples of models of femininity that counterbalanced the negative image of women disseminated by other Nerbini’s publications, like *Il 420*, and diverged from the Fascist model that could be found in women’s magazines such as *Grazia*.¹⁰⁶ *Il 420* was a satirical journal founded by Giuseppe Nerbini in 1914 and aligned with the Fascist regime, in which the image of women follow Fascist rhetoric: foreign women are the main subject of illustrations aimed at highlighting the superficiality and inconsistency of the female character, while Italian woman – portrayed as a mother – is often used to underline the negative features of foreign women and highlight the superiority of Italians. Moreover, Abyssinian women were often the target of *Il 420*’s satire, which depicted them as both sensual and primitive.¹⁰⁷

In contrast, in the early years of *L’Avventuroso* the female characters were active protagonists, reliable companions who supported the hero. A clear example of this is Dale Arden, Flash Gordon’s partner, who emanates an erotic femininity and showed an emancipation that was unfamiliar in Italian comics until then; Dale participates in the adventures alongside Gordon, facing dangerous situations with a certain audacity. However, Dale Arden’s courage and audacity are counterbalanced by her vanity, and she is an ‘ornamento e contrappunto romantico alle grandi avventure’,¹⁰⁸ showing the contradictions of women’s emancipation in the United States, as discussed in chapter 1. Other female characters such as Princess Aura, daughter of Ming the Merciless in ‘Flash Gordon’ or Princess Narda in ‘Mandrake the Magician’, not to mention policewoman Molli Dal from ‘Radio Patrol’, have an even stronger personality and offer a model of femininity that could not be further from the *sposa e madre esemplare*, but who

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Carabba, *Il fascismo a fumetti*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁷ For the analysis of women in *Il 420* (Florence: Nerbini, 1914 – 1944) see Zanatta, Zanghini, Guzzetta, *Le donne del fumetto*, pp. 48–53.

¹⁰⁸ Rossella Laterza, Marisa Vinella, *Le donne di carta* (Bari: Dedalo, 1980), p. 49. See also Zanatta, Zanghini, Guzzetta, *Le donne nel fumetto*, p. 43.

are still left in the shadow of the male protagonists. In other words, although at the centre of the action and essential part of the storyline, female characters in American adventure comics were still dependent on the hero, whose virility was ultimately at the core of the storyline.

In the early years of *L'Avventuroso* (1934–1936), American comics were published with little or no alteration, and the model of women disseminated throughout the magazine was characterised by an explicit eroticism that contrasted with the Fascist ideal image of the mother. From 1935, Nerbini protected *L'Avventuroso* from the increasing Fascist censorship by censoring the comics himself. This self-preventive-censorship was especially applied to illustrations judged too audacious. The eroticism of some female characters in American strips, such as Dale Arden in 'Flash Gordon' and Narda in 'Mandrake' started to be hidden by manipulation of the images: layers of clothing were added to cover their bodies and tone down their sensuality.

From 1938, a shift in the portrayal of female characters in Italian comics can be noticed. In Ferdinando Vichi's comics *La metropoli distrutta* (January 1938) and *Le avventure di Petrosino* (December 1938), for example, women had a clear subordinate role. In *La metropoli distrutta*, in particular, the female protagonist, Marisa, embodies the Fascist ideal woman: she is a reliable companion who supports the hero, serves the Fatherland, and is focused on her role as a mother even in adverse conditions. What is more, she is not only a mother and wife, but also a 'studentessa di medicina e praticante nelle sale chirurgiche della sua città',¹⁰⁹ reflecting the Fascist emphasis on the role of women in nursing.¹¹⁰ Mario Tempesti's *Agli ordini di Franco* (October – November 1938) offers another example of a Fascist woman with a subordinate role: Gianna, the only female character, is portrayed as a faithful companion to the hero and the Fatherland; she is in love with Mario because of his Fascist courage and *italianità*. Finally, in Toppi's *I tre di Maccallè* all the characters are men, leaving women completely out of the action. In other words, from 1938 female characters did not have a leading role anymore, with the exception of the American comics published between 1940 and 1941.

In general, female characters in *L'Avventuroso* were portrayed as sensual and adventurous women, revolutionising the image of women in comics, although they were nonetheless ultimately subordinated to the heroes. After the Fascist regime's intervention in the

¹⁰⁹ 'La metropoli distrutta', *L'avventuroso*, 27 February 1938, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ de Grazia, *How Fascist Ruled Women*, p. 196.

comics field, women figures reflected the Fascist rhetoric – and its inner contradictions –, portraying submissive women whose main role is that of mothers, wives, or good Fascists.¹¹¹

3.4 Italian and American comics in *L'Avventuroso* – four key stories

During its nine years of publication, *L'Avventuroso* published more than a hundred comic stories. The overall number of the Italian-made comics was higher than American comics, highlighting one of the main differences between the two styles: American comics were long-running series that lasted years, divided into episodes characterised by a specific event or adventure featuring the same protagonists; whereas Italian comic stories were shorter and self-contained, and featured different characters. For example, a series like 'Flash Gordon' was published over 205 issues, while an Italian story such as Toppi's 'I naufragatori misteriosi' only lasted 7 issues (67 – 73, from 19 January 1936 to 1 March 1936).

It would not be possible to analyse here all the stories published in the 439 issues of *L'Avventuroso* published by Nerbini. However, four key stories – the American 'Flash Gordon' and 'Mandrake', and the Italian 'Il dramma del sottomarino H-47' and 'La regina d'Atalanta' – can be taken as key examples for analysis of form, content and the impact and influence of American models.

1) Flash Gordon (Alex Raymond – Don Moore)

Flash Gordon was created by illustrator Alex Raymond and writer Don Moore, and first appeared in America in January 1934 as a Sunday comic strip, which became a daily in 1940. 'Flash Gordon' appeared alongside 'Jungle Jim', and was created to compete against the popular sci-fi hero 'Buck Rogers' (by Philip Francis Nowlan). The story features the hero, Flash Gordon, fighting against his arch-enemy Ming the Merciless, dictator of the planet Mongo, with the help of Dr. Zarkov, and Gordon's partner Dale Arden. In spite of a potentially controversial story for an Italian readership – a hero fighting against a dictatorship – Flash Gordon soon became the most successful and recognisable feature of *L'Avventuroso*.

Set in a non-identifiable future, Flash Gordon's adventure begins with a mysterious planet colliding with the Earth, threatening its existence. In these circumstances, Gordon meets

¹¹¹ Zanatta, Zaghini, Guzzetta, *Le donne nel fumetto*, pp. 42–55.

Dale Arden and Dr Zarkov. In an attempt to save Earth, the three protagonists find themselves on planet Mongo, dominated by Ming the Merciless. From the very first strip, Gordon begins a series of adventures on planet Mongo, first to save Dale – whom Ming decides to marry against her will – and finally to overthrow the evil dictator. His adventures are a mixture of sci-fi and fantasy settings, and more traditional combat which always see the hero almost defeated, before finally succeeding thanks to the help of ‘good’ characters, including Ming’s own daughter Aura.

According to Becciu, the success in Italy of Flash Gordon is due to the fact that ‘gli italiani ritrovavano in lui il superuomo esaltato dalla retorica imperante [fascista]’, and the hero was ‘inviso ai fascisti solo perché era un americano e non un italiano’.¹¹² This thesis is supported by the hero’s main characteristics: he is a charismatic leader, fighting for the greater good, successful with women and invincible. However, according to Carlo Della Corte, the success of Flash Gordon can be explained because of his fight for freedom and democracy, and what attracted the young readers was a set of values that differed from those imposed by the Fascist regime.¹¹³ However, although this interpretation offers an interesting reflection and adds political value to the reading of American comics in the Fascist era, *L’Avventuroso* was read mainly by young adolescents, too young to be politically aware: ‘Gli amici di Gordon in Italia sono tutti del 1923 e del 1924’.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, it is undeniable that for that generation, born in the mid-1920s, *L’Avventuroso* and American comics represented a form of cleavage from the generations that preceded them: ‘Quel foglio di carta colorata li divide non solo dai genitori e gli educatori [che non ne autorizzavano la lettura], ma anche dai ragazzi che avevano pochi anni più di loro’.¹¹⁵ It was only after 1943, and the constitution of the Resistance that American comics became an explicit symbol of anti-Fascist resistance, identifiable in the names chosen by many partisans that were inspired by or directly taken from American heroes.¹¹⁶

When Flash Gordon first appeared in *L’Avventuroso* in 1934, apart from the adaptation of titles and/or names, Nerbini reproduced the American strips faithfully; Flash Gordon represents a

¹¹² Becciu, *Il fumetto in Italia*, p. 86.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Del Buono, *Sul fumetto*, p. 112.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ ‘I miti dell’Avventura e dell’Esotismo affascinano i giovani nati e vissuti sotto il fascismo, alla ricerca affannosa di verità, di “una storia differente da quella studiata a scuola”, edificante, patriottica, retorica. Così si spiegano i tanti Tarzan, pirati, corsari, spadaccini e cow-boys, gli eroi dei romanzi polizieschi o gli esploratori che gremiscono l’esercito partigiano’, Franco Castelli, ‘Miti e simboli dell’immaginario partigiano: i nomi di battaglia’, in *Contadini e partigiani* (Alessandra: Edizioni dell’Orso, 1986), pp. 300–301.

clear example of how, at least at the beginning, Nerbini did not alter American models. On the contrary, he was so faithful to the original strips by KFS that the reproduction of Flash Gordon can be considered a *translated reprinting*, as the strips even maintained the small ‘to be continued’ caption on what originally constituted the last panel of the Sunday strip.

In the process of translation, the original dialogues were also Italianised reflecting specific features of the Italian language, like the use of the polite form. Both Gordon and L'uomo mascherato use the polite form ‘voi’ when talking to their partners, reflecting an Italian habit, and, later on, the Fascist campaign against the ‘lei’. Interestingly, in some cases the polite form is not used, like in the interaction between Princess Aura and Flash Gordon: unlike Dale, she uses the informal ‘tu’.¹¹⁷

2) Il dramma del sottomarino H-47 (Giove Toppi)

As has already been analysed, in 1935 Fascist rhetoric entered *L'Avventuroso*, influencing subjects and settings of Italian-made comics. Nonetheless, in his comic ‘Il dramma del sottomarino H-47’, it is telling that Toppi uses foreign names for his protagonists: James Watson, Cherie, Karl, and Marton. The story revolves around a war submarine, but no details are provided on who is fighting against whom, and the only information given about the setting of the story is of a battle in the North Sea: the ‘enemy’ is not identified. Engineer Watson equips the submarine with invincible torpedoes which spy Marton, together with Karl, try to sabotage. Both sides have their own victories: the spies succeed in sinking the submarine, whereas Cherie avenges the killing of her fiancé Watson by sinking the enemy’s submarines. The ending of the story is particularly interesting; the two women bemoan the death of their men: ‘Due case lontane ... due donne che pregano davanti a un ritratto. – Karl, moristi per il tuo paese [says Marton], – Watson, moristi per la tua patria! [says Cherie]. E in fondo al mare gli eroi oscuri giacciono accanto, amici e nemici...nella pace eterna della morte!’.¹¹⁸ In these sentences there are all the elements of Fascist myths and rituals: the men sacrificed themselves for the fatherland and were glorified by death. Moreover, if the two women had not been active protagonists in the story, as a spy and as a captain of a warship respectively, the last image of them would have been

¹¹⁷ See ‘La distruzione del mondo’, in *L'Avventuroso*, 18 November 1934, p.1, and *Il raggio del Dottor Zarkov* (Rome: Comic Art, 1991), p. 13.

¹¹⁸ ‘Il dramma del sottomarino H-47’, *L'Avventuroso*, 12 January 1936 (issue 66), p. 2.

another celebration of the Fascist myth of the role of women, praying at home for the fate of their men. The Fascist elements presented throughout the story can be seen as another example of the adaptation of the American model to the Italian predominant Fascist culture. Moreover, although some similarities in the prominent role of female protagonists of American comics can be found, in Toppi's story women take up a central role. Cherie and Marton are the real protagonists of the comic, they are active characters with a prominent role in the action. Unlike most American comics' female characters, Cherie and Marton's role in 'Il drama del sottomarino H-47' is not subordinated to the male protagonist; on the contrary, they successfully avenge their respective partner's death – Cherie even leading an attack and commanding a warship. Cherie and Marton both succeed in their missions taking a leading role, offering a model of femininity more audacious than the one set by the American Dale Arden or Diana Palmer, suggesting a further reinterpretation of the American model.

However, the influence of American comics emerges clearly in Toppi's style in the illustration, and the fast-paced rhythm of the adventure.

3) La regina d'Atalanta (Paolo Lorenzini – Giove Toppi)

Toppi was among the most prolific illustrators of *L'Avventuroso*. His style shows a heavy influence of American comic artists, and especially Alex Raymond's combination of realistic style and fantasy. Toppi's stories

navigano a vista fra i *topoi* del romanzo popolare d'avventura con qualche attenzione a Hollywood. L'esotismo a forti tinte, gli eroi sprezzanti, le donne *vamp* di Toppi sono senz'altro elementi tipicamente italiani, che provengono dal mondo dei romanzi d'appendice e a dispense [...] Ma sono allo stesso tempo assonanti con le suggestioni e gli eroi e le eroine di Alex Raymon e colleghi.¹¹⁹

Published in 1936, Toppi's *La regina d'Atalanta* is one of the most Americanised Italian comics in *L'Avventuroso* in both its style and visual dynamism.

The story begins on board a cruise ship, where the American Arabel French 'con venti anni e altrettanti milioni di dollari', followed by a French waitress Betty and the 'fedele negro' Mango, meets billionaire Mister Teddy Fulton during a circumnavigation trip. On board they

¹¹⁹ Gori, Gadducci, Lama, *Eccetto Topolino*, p. 216.

also meet with a Chinese man and a Brahman, who engage in intense conversation with Teddy about metempsychosis. Attracted by her wealth, the Chinese man and the Brahman convince Arabel to stop in Calcutta, where the adventure begins. After a few days in Calcutta, Arabel and Teddy meet detective Bob Haller, who informs them that the Chinese man they met on the cruise ship is in reality the 'famigerato Fo – Ki' who robs people of anything they have using opium. Detective Haller reveals Fo – Ki's plan to rob Teddy and Arabel by making Betty and Haller's partner, Sergeant Smith, pretend to be the American couple. All seems to end for the best, but Fo – Ki tricks the Americans and stuns them using opium. Alarmed by the disappearance of her lady, Betty warns detective Haller who begins to investigate the kidnapping of the couple. Two parallel stories develop: a detective story that follows Haller's investigation, and a fantasy story that sees Teddy travelling into the deep ocean to save Arabel, turned into a statue of a forgotten city under the sea – Atalanta. The rhythm of the narration speeds up and within five episodes the two stories come to an end: Teddy saves Arabel, and they are both saved by detective Haller. It is only at the end of the comic that the readers realise that the story of the queen of Atalanta, Arabel, saved by Teddy was a dream induced by Fo – Ki's opium. The ending is a classic happy ending: Arabel and Teddy get married and start travelling together, followed by 'il buon negro Fedele Mango', while Betty and Bob Haller fall in love.

The first characteristics that emerge from the story are the dynamism of the action and the complexity of the plot. The comic mixes different genres, a detective, an adventure, and a fantasy story. Furthermore, the comic can be clearly divided into two different parts: the first part introducing characters and plot, and set on board of the cruise ship; the second following the adventures set in Calcutta. In this second part, the plot becomes more complicated and, from a pure detective story, the comic is transformed into an adventure and fantasy story.

Many similarities with American comics can be noted, particularly to Flash Gordon. A clear example is the undersea adventure, when by trying to save Arabel Teddy discovers an underwater city, which recalls Flash Gordon's first adventure on planet Mongo and a scene from Mandrake the Magician's second episode *The Hawk*. Moreover, Arabel's features and sensuality also resemble that of the American-style illustrations.

Finally, the dynamism of the action also resembles American adventure comics, with specific scenes that share many similarities. For example, the style of the illustration of Arabel's kidnapping is similar to The Phantom's episode in which the hero saves his girlfriend. In both

images, in a dramatic landscape the couples are intertwined, and the female is presented as a damsel in distress saved by the male protagonist. However, in the American comic Narda/Daran is sexualised, not only for her red dress but also in the way the hero holds onto her. Although clearly in a passive role, Narda is the focus of the scene. On the other hand, in Toppi's illustration the male figure is in the centre and catches the readers' eye, whereas Arabel, fully clothed, is only half visible.¹²⁰

Toppi's comic offers a clear example of the presence of American models, from a formal and substantial point of view: his protagonists are American, and his style is inspired by American comics. However, the choice of an exotic setting such as Calcutta also recalls the traditional Italian adventure novel, such as the adventure novels by Salgari. In other words, 'La regina d'Atalanta' is an example of how the two cultures merges, creating an *Italian* comic, a result of the Americanisation of Italian comics, and the Italianisation of the American model.

4) Mandrake the Magician (Lee Falk – Phil Davis)

Among all the heroes whose adventures were published in *L'Avventuroso*, Mandrake is arguably the only one with superhuman powers. His characteristic feature is not his incredible physical strength – like Flash Gordon – but his ability to use illusion and hypnotism to defeat his enemies. Mandrake's lack of a particular physical strength is balanced by the constant presence of Lothar, his giant Nubian servant. Mandrake is an elegant white man, always wearing a tuxedo, who, like Flash Gordon, fascinates women. Princess Narda, who appears in the second episode of the saga – *The Hawk*, published in *L'Avventuroso* in 1935, planned to seduce Mandrake and then, as agreed with the villain Hawk, to poison him. However, she soon falls in love with Mandrake, and rather than poisoning him, convinces Hawk to throw him into the sea, chained and incapable of moving. Thanks to his powers, Mandrake is able to communicate with Lothar, who rescues him. Mandrake, who has realised Princess Narda is being blackmailed by Hawk, decides to rescue her. From this point on, Narda loses her independence, and becomes a subordinate character at the mercy of events, a pretty woman to be saved by the hero. However, until then, she represented a strong character with her own personality, who misled both the hero and the

¹²⁰ See *The Phantom* with Daran/Narda, 'L'uomo mascherato', *L'Avventuroso*, 11 April 1937, and the scene of the kidnapping of Arabel, 'La regina d'Atalanta', *L'Avventuroso*, 12 April 1936. The Phantom's episode here illustrated was published exactly one year later than 'La regina d'Atalanta'. This demonstrates how Toppi had already been influenced by the style of American comic artists.

villain. In the fourth episode, 'Il cammello d'argilla' published in *L'Avventuroso* in 1937, Narda reappears as an independent character with her own storyline and mission, joining Mandrake to fight against the same enemy. However, despite the evolution of their relationship in this episode, Narda is not a regular presence in the comic, and in the two following episodes, 'Il fenomeno del circo' (1937) and 'L'enigmatico Davos' (1938), two other female characters appear, both fragile women respectively whom Mandrake has to save.

Overall, the role of women in Mandrake is consistent with the general habit of American comics of depicting women in a subordinate, although often active, role. It was a model of femininity that contrasted with the traditional image of woman as a mother and wife: female protagonists, who often engage in a romantic relationship with the hero, are involved in the adventures, and have a role outside the domestic sphere.

Another interesting element of the story worth mentioning, is the role of Lothar. Lothar is introduced in the story as an African-born prince, who nonetheless decides to serve Mandrake: from a noble position, he becomes a servant who refers to Mandrake as his master. Lothar's role in the comic is that of a subordinate servant, with an incredible strength that saves Mandrake in many critical situations. Although there is no explicit racism, in his clothing and language Lothar is a clear representation of the subordination of the black race.

4. Conclusion

L'Avventuroso was not the only Italian comic magazine in the 1930s to publish American comics or Italian interpretations of them, but it certainly was the only one that based its success overwhelmingly on its American heroes. It was the periodical that more than any other suffered from the 1938 interdiction of foreign material, and its evolution demonstrates the extent of the influence and creative impact of the American model on Italian comics. Illustrators such as Toppi, Vichi, and Lemmi, adapted their style and began to produce modern Italian comics shaped on the example of American adventure comics. The evolution of Italian comics published in *L'Avventuroso* from 1934 to 1938 in particular reveals a change in Italian comics, which tended to emulate the American example in terms of both dynamism of the action, and settings, as the analysis of Toppi's comics demonstrate. Moreover, the presence of traditionally Italian exotic settings, reflected in stories such as 'Il cacciatore di Serpenti' (1934) or 'Il Negriero'

(1935) and even the Americanised 'La regina d'Atalanta' (1936), shows how the two cultures merged to create hybrid forms, both American and specifically Italian at the same time.

The translation of names is a particularly revealing example of this: Italian comics tended to use mostly foreign names, and often reflected the American origins of the protagonists, as shown in the analysis of Toppi's stories, whereas in the American comics names were Italianised. The use of the language is thus another element which demonstrates the dual process of Italianisation of American comics, and of Americanisation of Italian comics which characterises both the history of modern Italian comics, and, in particular, the modernisation of comics in the Fascist era. Therefore, *L'Avventuroso* not only represents a crucial case study for the spreading of American culture, but also for the development of modern Italian comics.

It is worth highlighting how the Italianisation of American comics survived the war and became if anything even more visible in post-war Italy. A clear example of this is the translation of Carl Bark's character Scrooge McDuck, changed into 'Paperon de' Paperoni' completely changing the meaning of the original name and its subtle criticism against capitalism. Paperon de' Paperoni first appeared in Italy in 1947 and demonstrates how the process of Italianisation had become a common practice, which later on led to the creation of Italian Disney characters, such as Brigitta (1960), Paperinik (1969), and Indiana PIPPS (1988).¹²¹

Another clear illustration of the Italianisation of American models is the series 'Tex Willer', created by Sergio Bonelli in 1948, the longest running of all Italian comic book series. 'Tex' shows in setting and storyline how Italian *fumetti* developed following the American example: Tex is a ranger of the American West, conveying the American myth and engaging the reader in the typical American genre story made of Indians, cowboys, and the frontier. More importantly, the success of 'Tex' demonstrates that the taste of Italian readers retained the fascination with America and American models at the heart of *L'Avventuroso*, that adventure comics shaped on the American model had become part of Italian culture. *L'Avventuroso* marks the first steps of this process of cultural appropriation, which was embedded in the complexities of the Fascist period but nevertheless worked to deep transform both Italian comics and Italian readers' tastes.

¹²¹ On the history of Disney Italian comics see Alberto Becattini, Luca Boschi, Leonardo Gori, Andrea Sani, *I Disney italiani*, 2 vols (Rome: Nicola Pesce Editore, 2012).

The analysis of popular comics in 1930s Italy, their evolution and the changes imposed by the Fascist regime, shows how American comics had a deep influence on the newly expanding and widely popular field of Italian comics, comparable in many respects of depth and scope to the influence of Hollywood. At the same time, the case of *L'Avventuroso* also clearly demonstrates the peculiarity of comic magazines and their development compared to other fields of popular print media. Popular magazines in Europe and the United States developed in dialogue, sharing features such as layout, organisation of the content, and content itself, but also creating their own localised styles and models. The comics of the interwar years represent a unique field, in which Anglo-Saxon models were heavily prevalent, unlike the case studies examined in chapters 3 and 4 where European models were also strongly present.

III. THE FIRST ITALIAN *ROTOCALCO*: *OMNIBUS* (1937 – 1939)

Sono riuscito a fare un giornale italiano cioè
assai diverso da quelli francesi e americani’.

Leo Longanesi.¹

1. Leo Longanesi and the creation of *Omnibus*

Omnibus - settimanale di attualità politica e letteraria had a brief life, lasting only 22 months, from April 1937 to the end of January 1939. It was published by the Milanese publisher Rizzoli and created by Leo Longanesi, a figure already known to both a wider Italian readership and the Fascist regime for his weekly, then fortnightly, publication *L’Italiano* (Rome: [n. publ.] 1926 – 1942). As we shall see, despite its brief life, *Omnibus* played a crucial role in the development of the modern popular press in Italy. In particular, before the publication of *Omnibus* only women’s magazines were printed using the rotogravure. For its significant role in modernising the Italian periodical press, for its innovative layout and for its challenging content, *Omnibus* is taken as the second case study of this dissertation, a rich illustration of the successes and also the complexity and contradictions of magazine’s production under the Fascist regime

Longanesi had been developing the idea of a new magazine since autumn 1930, as demonstrated by a letter he wrote to his friend, the intellectual Camillo Pellizzi: ‘fui a Roma, tempo fa, e parlai col Duce per la rivista che sembra si faccia: speriamo’.² However, it took almost seven years to publish *Omnibus*. At the beginning of 1931, Longanesi temporarily abandoned the project, possibly because of the difficulties in obtaining authorisation from the Fascist regime to publish a new periodical: ‘ogni speranza di pubblicare quella famosa rivista sembra ormai scomparsa’, he wrote to friend and journalist Giovanni Ansaldo.³ It was only at the end of 1933 or the beginning of 1934 that Longanesi finally obtained the authorisation from Mussolini ‘per “studiare” un grande settimanale popolare, *Omnibus*’.⁴ Two years later, in 1935,

¹ Leo Longanesi, letter to Giovanni Ansaldo, 11 February 1937, quoted in Indro Montanelli, Marcello Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1984), p. 231.

² Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 168.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203. The steps in the creation of *Omnibus* are also traced by Ivano Granata, *L’Omnibus di Leo Longanesi. Politica e cultura: aprile 1937 – gennaio 1939* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2016), pp. 11–14.

the *Duce* approved the publication of the magazine: ‘la faccenda Rizzoli è ormai alla fine: il Duce mi ha dato il consenso: ora, se non se lo mangia il Ministero [della Stampe e la Propaganda], potrò finalmente dirigere questo settimanale’, wrote Longanesi to Ansaldo.⁵ Nonetheless, it took a further two years and more meetings between Longanesi and Mussolini before the magazine was finally published, reflecting the difficulties posed by the Fascist censorship, or at least its control over the periodical press in the 1930s.⁶

The Fascist regulation of the periodical press, examined in chapter 1, not only delayed the authorisation to produce and publish *Omnibus*, but also the organisation of its editorial team, as another letter from Longanesi to Ansaldo demonstrates: ‘In questi giorni sto organizzando la redazione, ma purtroppo senza redattori perché il Rizzoli non vuole redattori *per via del contratto giornalistico*’.⁷ As a result, Longanesi was the only official editor of *Omnibus* on Rizzoli’s payroll and had to rely on regular collaborators ‘pagati a settimana secondo gli articoli’.⁸

During its brief life, the magazine did not change its layout and the main columns and features remained the same. Some sections were dedicated to domestic and international politics, with exclusive reports and editorials, and there were entire pages on culture. The regular columns were:

- ‘Guerra e pace’, on current affairs, anonymously signed by ‘Omnibus’ in 1937 and, later, by ‘Ricciardetto’, pseudonym of Augusto Guerriero;
- ‘Il sofà delle muse’, written mainly by Arrigo Benedetti, Emilio Cecchi and Mario Praz, dedicated to literature and with a particular focus on Italian writers;
- ‘Giorno e notte’, a page on cinema with film reviews, interviews and gossip, created by Mario Pannunzio and Antonietta Drago;
- ‘Giallo e rosso’, which contained theatre reviews by Alberto Savinio (‘Palchetti romani’) and music reviews by Bruno Barilli (‘Il sorcio nel violino’).

⁵ Ibid., p. 203 and 220.

⁶ Before authorising the creation of *Omnibus*, Mussolini had asked for a dossier on Longanesi. See ACS, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione generale della Pubblica sicurezza, Divisione Polizia politica, b. 730, f. ‘Longanesi Leo’. The date of the request seems to match the period in which Longanesi started to shape the new magazine. The dossier is also quoted in Granata, *L’Omnibus di Leo Longanesi*, p. 12.

⁷ Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 231 (emphasis mine).

⁸ Gino Visentini in Corrado Pizzinelli, *Parliamo di Longanesi* (Rome: Grafica San Giovanni, 1988), p. 78.

There were also irregular columns, such as ‘Il mercurio – cronache finanziarie’, on economic issues, which was unsigned; ‘Il Ventaglio’, which published comments and pictures on fashion and style; and ‘La fiera della vanità’, a gossip column, both edited by Irene Brin; and ‘Campoaperto’, dedicated to sports and written by different authors. As can be seen by the range of topics, *Omnibus* was a combination of a current affairs magazine and a cultural periodical, consistent with, or even a little broader than its own definition in its subtitle: *settimanale di attualità politica e letteraria*.

In addition to the (unofficial) regular staff, such as the authors of these regular features, many other irregular contributors wrote for the magazine, among whom it is worth highlighting the presence of some of the most prominent figures of Italian journalism and literature: Corrado Alvaro, Dino Buzzati, Emilio Cecchi, Ennio Flaiano, Indro Montanelli, Alberto Moravia, Aldo Palazzeschi, Giaime Pintor, Mario Praz, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Mario Soldati, Tito Spagnol and Elio Vittorini, to mention only a few. Illustrators Mino Maccari, Novello, Bernardo Leporini and Amerigo Baroli, not to mention Longanesi himself, also contributed to *Omnibus* with satirical illustrations and comic strips.⁹ Moreover, together with Primo Zeglio, who focused on the layout, Arrigo Benedetti and Mario Pannunzio, Longanesi practically created and composed the magazine himself, assembling articles and pictures to form the now famous look of *Omnibus*. In spite of having a conspicuous number of collaborators, then, Longanesi maintained a central role in the production of the magazine, supervising and intervening in every article before publishing it: as Montanelli and Staglieno write, ‘le sue mani [...] si limitavano ufficialmente a firmare il foglio come direttore responsabile; ma nella realtà si calavano negli scritti altrui per uniformarli, snellirli, renderli tesi nel procedere, aggiungendo qua un aggettivo, là tagliando un paragrafo, per rimaneggiarli’.¹⁰

Omnibus aimed at a broadly popular, but also cultured readership. Longanesi stated in a letter to Pellizzi on 17 February 1937, that wanted to create a popular magazine: ‘[*Omnibus*] non sarà un organo letterario ma un giornale popolare’.¹¹ However, he also focused on the quality of the writing, and on creating a product that was both ‘popolare e sofisticato’ at the same time;¹² in

⁹ See *Arte moltiplicata. L'immagine del '900 italiano nello specchio dei rotocalchi*, ed. by Barbara Cinelli, Flavio Fergonzi, Maria Grazia Messina, Antonello Negri (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2013), p. 97.

¹⁰ Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 235.

¹¹ Quoted in *Leo Longanesi: 1905–1957. Editore, scrittore, artista*, ed. by Giuseppe Appella, Paolo Longanesi, Marco Vallora (Milan: Longanesi, 1996), p. 266.

¹² Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 235.

other words, serious attention was paid to the writing style, but without losing sight of potential readers:

non si perde mai di vista il largo pubblico, di cui sono indizio preciso anche solo le rubriche dedicate alla donna [...] si possono leggere servizi con la consueta attenzione ai particolari curiosi, divertenti: satira di costume, in fondo, ma dove non si indulge mai alle ottuse prevenzioni del nazionalismo allora di prammatica.¹³

According to Mauro Lombardo and Fabrizio Pignatelli, authors of one of the key studies of the modern Italian periodical press, *Omnibus* was a magazine clearly addressed to ‘una élite estremamente ristretta’ and ‘un lettore di livello sociale e di cultura medio-alta’.¹⁴ Nonetheless, *Omnibus*’ first issue, published on 28 March 1937 but dated 3 April, sold 42,000 copies and the magazine reached a circulation record of 70-100,000 copies per week, according to one source, before being shut down at the end of January 1939.¹⁵

The content of the regular columns seems to reflect Longanesi’s aim to create ‘un grande settimanale popolare’, and a close analysis of their cultural content, examined below, demonstrates how, in spite of not being a ‘popular’ magazine as conceived nowadays, *Omnibus* targeted a wide range of readership, offering a carefully judged combination of serious analysis and entertainment. At the same time, however, Longanesi intended to make *Omnibus* a high-quality magazine and paid careful attention to the writing style of the articles. The development of the *rotocalco* thus reflected and contributed to the dissemination of popular culture in contrast but also in combination with ‘high’ culture, with exponents of the latter shaping the popular content of the former.¹⁶

Printed using the rotogravure, *Omnibus* played a key role in the transformation of the Italian periodical press in format and production, and has been widely recognised as the first Italian *rotocalco*, which set a model for many future magazine publications and reflected the spread of photojournalism worldwide.

¹³ Annamaria Andreoli, *Leo Longanesi. La fabbrica del dissenso* (Rome: De Luca, 2006), p. 112.

¹⁴ Lombardo, Pignatelli, *La stampa periodica*, p. 5 and p. 46.

¹⁵ There is no official documentation on circulation records. These figures are from *Storia degli editori italiani*, p. 322; Montanelli and Staglieno in *Leo Longanesi*, p. 239, affirm it reached 100,000 copies.

¹⁶ Similarly, Mondadori availed himself of intellectuals for his women’s magazine *Grazia*, such as Giorgio Scerbanenco and Zavattini, as discussed in the following chapter.

Although many studies of *Omnibus* have been published, there is no focused examination that examines how and why *Omnibus* was formally and culturally innovative, particularly in relation to foreign influences. Generally, the political attitude of Longanesi and his *Omnibus* has been at the centre of previous analyses, and, as far as foreign influence is concerned, former collaborators' claims have been acknowledged but not adequately verified. In particular, whilst *Omnibus*' attitude towards the United States has been extensively addressed by both Michel Beynet, in an influential study of the image of America in Fascist Italy, and recently again by Ivano Granata, both do so under the heading of anti-Americanism.¹⁷ Both Granata and Beynet define *Omnibus* as an anti-American magazine aligned with the Fascist regime, pointing out how American society and culture were consistently depicted in its pages as barbaric and immoral; whereas Indro Montanelli and Marcello Staglieno, in their biography of Longanesi, suggest that the magazine was an expression of anti-conformism and dissent.¹⁸ However, the aim of this chapter is not to assess the attitude of *Omnibus* or Longanesi towards the Fascist regime nor to label aspects of it 'Fascist' or 'anti-Fascist', but rather to try and answer the question of how and why *Omnibus* was innovative in the magazine sector and how it fitted into the broad context of Italian illustrated magazines in the interwar years that is the focus of this dissertation. In this chapter, key aspects of *Omnibus* are analysed in order to try to address these questions. Particular attention is paid to the presence of foreign models, European and American, from both a formal and a substantial point of view. The analysis of the magazine is thus aimed at verifying the claims made, as we shall see, by various contributors to *Omnibus* that foreign models – from the French *Marianne* (Paris: n.publ. 1932 – 1940) and the German *Uhu* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1924–1934) to the American *The New Yorker* (New York: Condé Nast, 1925 –) and especially *Life* (Chicago: Time Inc., 1936 –) – profoundly influenced the magazine. Such an influence has yet to be fully investigated.

As has already been pointed out in chapter 1, in the interwar years both in Europe and the US, a new product had attained popularity with a mass readership: the pictorial magazine. Like the *Vu* in France, and *BIZ* in Germany, in Italy *Omnibus* became one of the first and most

¹⁷ Beynet, *L'image de l'Amérique*, pp. 119–167; Granata, *L'Omnibus di Leo Longanesi*.

¹⁸ Beynet, *L'image de l'Amérique*, pp. 119–197, see in particular p. 162: 'Presque tous les articles [...] qu'*Omnibus* consacre à l'Amérique sont antiaméricains'; Granata, *L'Omnibus di Leo Longanesi*, pp. 126–131. Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, pp. 231–253.

popular modern Italian cultural magazines to make widespread use of illustrations and photo-images, either in support of articles or as independent means of information. In spite of the Fascist policy of cultural autarchy, *Omnibus* offers a striking example of the appropriation and adaptation of American and European to Italian culture, which, in ways comparable to the analysis of *L'Avventuroso* in chapter 2, characterised the modernisation of Italian periodical press.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 is dedicated to analysing *Omnibus*'s general aspects and key features, particularly the influence of foreign models over its layout (section 1.1), how the magazine was produced, and the role of images (section 1.2). Section 2 focuses on the attention given by *Omnibus* to foreign culture through the analysis of the literary content of *Omnibus* (2.1), and 'Giorno e notte', a section of the magazine devoted to cinema (2.2); both sections are particularly revealing of the constant, although ambivalent, presence of American culture in the magazine. Specific attention is given in section 2.1 to the feature on page ten of each issue, which offered an episode of a serialised novel. A consequence of the consideration of the role of novels in *Omnibus* is a discussion of their translation, their place and language of origin and issues that arose connected to Fascist censorship. The analysis of 'Giorno e notte' focuses instead on the perspective adopted by *Omnibus* towards the film industry, and especially Hollywood, which played such a crucial role in this period both as the dominant producer of films and symbol of cinema, as well as of American culture in general.¹⁹ A final consideration on the attitude of *Omnibus* to the United States is made in section 2.3, through analyses of the different, and often contradictory, images of America and American culture disseminated through an array of other images and articles in the magazines.

1.1 A wide network – *Omnibus* and the influence of French, German and American magazines

When *Omnibus* appeared on the newsstands, the first elements that captured the readers' attention would have been its dimension and visual aspect: unlike other periodicals, *Omnibus*

¹⁹ In the 1930s, the success of cinema, dominated by Hollywood, encouraged the launch of several magazines focused exclusively on cinema, featuring film criticism, film stars' biographies, feature articles, advice columns and cine-novels. Key examples include: *Cinema Illustrazione* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1926 – 1939); *Cine Romanzo* (Milan: Editrice Popolare Milanese, 1929 – 1935, then *Cine Illustrato*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1935 – 1960); and *Cinema* (Milan: Hoepli, then Rizzoli, 1936 – 1943). See De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta*, pp. 31–39.

was the same size as a daily newspaper – the so-called *formato lenzuolo*, 55.5cm x 40cm – but the space was mainly occupied by pictures. It cost one *lira*, had 12 pages – apart from some exceptions – and as already mentioned the first issue sold up to 42,000 copies. Longanesi's aim was to produce a popular Italian weekly that distinguished itself from French and American products circulating in Italy at that time.²⁰

Nonetheless, looking at *Omnibus* it is possible to find many similarities to other European and American magazines. As Montanelli and Staglieno comment, 'Leo tenne d'occhio certamente i raffinati modelli mitteleuropei da *Querschnitt* [Berlin: Ullstein – Propyläen, 1921–1936] a *Huhu* [sic], e, insieme, l'americana *Life* e la francese *Marianne*'.²¹ The latter in particular, according to Visentini, was the main point of reference in the creation of *Omnibus*: '*Omnibus* non aveva precedenti cui rifarsi: il solo giornale che potevamo tener presente come rotocalco o modello era una rivista francese che si chiamava *Marianne*. La leggevamo sempre'.²² Looking at *Marianne*, many similarities with *Omnibus* can indeed be noted. First, the subtitles of the magazines were almost identical: *Marianne* defined itself a 'Grand hebdomadaire politique et littéraire illustré', while *Omnibus* was a 'settimanale di attualità politica e letteraria', thus omitting the definition of weekly 'illustré'. Second, a remarkable similarity can be found also in the organisation of the pages and the balance between images and words: in both magazines the text is organised in columns that surround and frame the pictures.

As far as German magazines are concerned, it is interesting to note that both *Querschnitt* and *Uhu*, mentioned by Montanelli and Staglieno, have a similar layout to another well-known magazine of the time, the *New Yorker*, with which they share the predominance of text over illustrations, and the use of a neat, elegant type – a feature which can also be found in *Omnibus*.

²⁰ '[S]ono riuscito a fare un giornale italiano cioè assai diverso da quelli francesi e americani', Longanesi to Giovanni Ansaldo, 11 February 1937; quoted in Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 231. Longanesi's statement not only reveals his attention to foreign press, but also confirms that foreign magazines were circulating in Italy in those years. See 'Il nuovo periodico. Rotocalchi tra fotogiornalismo, cronaca e costume', in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano*, p. 37. Gigliola Gori notes that in 1938 'a ban was placed on imports of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Marie-Claire*', see Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body. Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 174. See also ACS, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, f. 4, b. 54 'Life'.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²² Visentini, quoted in Granata, *L'Omnibus di Leo Longanesi*, p. 22. On *Marianne*, see Catherine Helbert, *La vie de Marianne: monographie de l'hebdomadaire Marianne (1932–1936)* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University Sorbonne, 2001).

American magazines also had a significant role in the shaping of *Omnibus*. According to Benedetti, in *Omnibus* there was:

L'apporto notevole dell'espressionismo tedesco [...] della cultura francese [...] della *Nouvelle Revue Française*, di *Le Crapouillot* e del dadaismo; e c'era l'apporto del giornalismo anglosassone: s'intravedeva cioè una grande ammirazione per la stampa inglese, e soprattutto una commozione per gli elementi che derivavano dal grande giornalismo illustrato americano: da *Life* [...] *Look*, da *Time*, al *New Yorker*, per quanto riguardava lo stile letterario.²³

Benedetti's testimony not only confirms the influence of foreign models on *Omnibus*, but, more importantly, highlights the cultural exchange between European and American cultures, and Italy's reception of foreign models in the 1930s in a varied, open-minded mix. An interesting example, which shows how *Omnibus* was part of a wide and connected cultural context, is offered by its connection with *Life*. On 17 July 1937, for example, one of the photos published on *Omnibus*' cover page, which shows elegant young British boys talking next to poor children – entitled 'Le grandi democrazie - contrasti' – also appeared on *Life* magazine on 2 August 1937. The two photos were published in completely different contexts, however: in *Omnibus*, it accompanies an article on the Spanish Civil War which attacks the European democracies and praises Fascism and Nazism as the only forces fighting against Bolshevism, whereas in *Life* the photo is part of a photographic report on the Eton-Harrow cricket match.

The use of the same image in two different contexts reveals how Longanesi manipulated images and adapted them to the satirical tone of the magazine – a photo-shoot from a cricket match used to highlight British striking class differences – and how the same picture circulated worldwide, showing the international role of news agencies.²⁴ Furthermore, on 20 September 1937, *Life* published an article on *Omnibus*, summarising the content and reproducing the pictures of the article 'Le tedesche' published in issue 18 (31 July 1937). According to *Life*,

²³ Arrigo Benedetti, 'Diario italiano. Omnibus', *L'Espresso*, 6 October 1957, quoted in Granata, 'L' "Omnibus" di Leo Longanesi', pp.131–132. The literary content of *Omnibus* is discussed further below.

²⁴ On the role of news agencies in the interwar years see Kent Cooper, *Barriers Down; the Story of the News Agency Epoch* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1942); Terhi Rantanen, 'Foreign Dependence and Domestic Monopoly: The European News Cartel and U.S. Associated Presses, 1861–1932', *Media History*, 12.1 (2006), 19–35; Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News: the Associated Press, Press Association, and Reuters, 1848–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), particularly chapter 7, 'Cartel or Free Trade: Supplying the World's News, 1856–1947', pp. 196–225.

‘*Omnibus* charged German women, [portrayed] doing calisthenic dancing, are [sic] ugly and flirtatious’, and ‘printed [an] old picture of German women bowling, to show their fat legs’.²⁵

The piece summarised the article originally written by Paolo Monelli:

The *Omnibus* article [...] explained that Nazism insults the German woman by rating her solely as a childbearer in a Superior society of males and resents the idea that the State is the result of ‘a common thought between a man and a woman’. The docile Nazi woman, said *Omnibus*, has red swollen hands, pimples, straight hair, no make-up and smells of laundry and cheap toothpaste. ‘But tomorrow she will be the most effective force of revolution’.²⁶

In the original article, Monelli indeed described the German women as soldiers – ‘sulla pelle strigliata violentemente con l’acqua fredda e lo spazzolino avevano i rossori e le durezza e i foruncoletti dei *coscritti*’/‘i piedi nel fango calzati di scarpe grosse, allineate in parate, con occhi limpidi e dure [...] trasumanate quasi dal voto’ –²⁷ but highlighted how, despite being considered ‘inferiore all’uomo sotto ogni punto di vista, [...] anzi, meglio che inferiore, è un essere diverso e accessorio’, the German woman appears to be ‘più intelligente dell’uomo tedesco, o diciamo più geniale’.²⁸

This was not the only case of a direct and explicit link between *Omnibus* and an American magazine. On many occasions, *Omnibus* translated and published articles or interviews that had appeared previously in American magazines, sometimes putting together different pieces and summarising them to fit *Omnibus*’ purposes; in such cases, it was not always possible to establish with certainty the original source of the articles. This is the case for an article on Fred Astaire, signed by Eustis Morton, published in the 9th issue of *Omnibus* (29 May 1937); or, on 4 September 1937, an article by Jim Tully translated by C. E. – possibly Emilio Cecchi or Emilio Ceretti – on Charlie Chaplin, the original of which appeared in *The New Movie Magazine* in 1930.²⁹ Again, on 13 November 1937, Jim Marshall’s article ‘La morte dal cielo’,

²⁵ ‘The Camera Overseas: An Italian magazine insults German Women, throwing sand once again in the unpopular Rome-Berlin Axis’, *Life*, 20 September 1937, p. 97.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paolo Monelli, ‘Le tedesche’, *Omnibus*, 17 July 1937, p. 1 (emphasis mine).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Eustis Morton, ‘Intermezzo con Fred Astaire’, *Omnibus*, 29 May 1937. This piece is probably a translation and a reduction of original articles and interviews with Fred Astaire published in Eustis Morton, *Players at Work* (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1937), see especially pp. 100 ff. Jim Tully, ‘Charlot segreto (traduzione e riduzione C. E.)’, *Omnibus*, 4 September 1937, p. 9; for the original article see Jim Tully, ‘The Unknown Chaplin’, *The New Movie Magazine*, July – December 1930. Other European magazines also translated American articles. See, for example, Frank Waldo, ‘Charles Chaplin. A Portrait’, *Scribner’s Magazine*, September 1929, pp. 237–244, which

an accurate translation from *Collier's Weekly*, occupied the whole of page three.³⁰ A slightly different case is a piece signed by Amelia Earhart, 'Le donne e il coraggio', published on 17 July 1937, for which no plausible original magazine source is available, but which closely follows pages of her autobiography, published in 1932.³¹

American articles were also translated as part of *Omnibus*' foreign affairs section: pieces written by authors such as Blair Bolles, Channing Pollock, and Fletcher Pratt appeared on the first two pages, dedicated to foreign affairs and political analyses, offering first hand criticism of Roosevelt's New Deal and aggressive American foreign policy.³²

American culture was also present through comic strips. In particular, from the 3rd issue (17 April 1937), *Omnibus* introduced Italian readers to *Little King* by Otto Soglow, a comic strip that had made its first appearance in 1931 in the *New Yorker* and was regularly published in *Omnibus* until the magazine closed.³³

As these examples demonstrate, Loganesi kept a close eye on and drew significantly on the American press. The use of images was also a key channel for American and other foreign influences. In the next section, the overall look of *Omnibus* and the crucial role of pictures within it are analysed as part of the account of how *Omnibus* was an innovator in the Italian magazine market.

appeared as 'Der weiche und der harte Charlie Chaplin', *Der Querschnitt*, 4 April 1931 pp. 233–237; and Mack Sennett, 'Les débuts de Charlot', *Vu*, 1 April 1931, pp. 462–463, of which it was not possible to find the original article.

³⁰ Jim Marshall, 'La morte dal cielo', *Omnibus*, 13 November 1937 (unknown translator); a translation of Jim Marshall, 'Death from the Sky', *Collier's Weekly*, 16 October 1937, p. 9 and ff.

³¹ Amelia Earhart, 'Le donne e il coraggio. L'ultimo articolo di Amelia Earhart', *Omnibus*, 17 July 1937, p. 5 (unknown translator), possibly taken from Earhart's autobiography, *The Fun of it: Random Records of My Own Flying and of Women in Aviation* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932).

³² Blair Bolles, 'Quanto costa Roosevelt', *Omnibus*, 26 March 1938, pp. 1–2, possibly a translation of 'The Sweetheart of the Regimenters', *The American Mercury*, September 1936; Channing Pollock, 'La paura americana', *Omnibus*, 19 November 1938, pp. 1–2, a translation of 'The Survival of the Unfittest', *The American Mercury*, August 1936; and Fletcher Pratt, 'USA stato aggressivo', *Omnibus*, 24 December 1938, pp. 1–2, a translation of 'U.S.A.: the Aggressor Nation', *The American Mercury*, December 1938.

³³ When *Little King* was published in *Omnibus*, the *New Yorker* no longer owned the copyright: rather it belonged to KFS, from which Longanesi bought many of the American articles. See *Gulp! Cent'anni a fumetti*, ed. by Ferruccio Giromini (Milan: Electa, 1996), p. 119. See, for example, Otto Soglow, 'Il piccolo re', *Omnibus*, 17 April 1937, p. 12. In the corner, it says: 'Copyright King Feature Syndicate e, per l'Italia, di Omnibus'.

1.2 'È l'ora delle immagini'

As already anticipated, one of the main innovative features of *Omnibus* was its use of images of various kinds. Photographs, photocollages and comic strips were used to create a visually striking product. Thanks to the dimension of the magazine, and the use of the rotogravure printing technology, Longanesi was able to play with pictures and combine traditional articles with modern techniques: '*Omnibus* era un miscuglio raffinato di classicità e novità', recalls Oreste Del Buono, 'la grande forza di *Omnibus* si precisò nell'antagonismo e nella fusione di letteratura e fotografia: il giornale [...] già al primo colpo d'occhio agganciava l'attenzione, attraeva ad assaporare immagini e parole'.³⁴ As Montanelli and Staglieno comment:

La sua fede nella capacità rappresentativa dell'immagine e della 'cosa vista', che lo portava in termini di pagina scritta ad accumulare non *giudizi* ma *fatti* o reperti di realtà maliziosamente accostati per colpire l'attenzione, aveva trovato con *Omnibus* la più felice realizzazione.³⁵

This reflected Longanesi's idea of a new form of journalism that used images as a means of information equal to text. As he wrote in 1937:

È l'ora dell'attualità. È l'ora delle immagini. Il nostro nuovo Plutarco è l'obiettivo Kodak, che uccide la realtà con un processo ottico e lo fissa come lo spillo fissa la farfalla sul cartoncino. Oggetti e persone, fuori dal tempo, dallo spazio e dalle leggi di casualità divengono una visione. La fotografia coglie il mondo in flagrante.³⁶

Photos added meaning and provided support to articles but, at the same time, they could be independent. In an article published in 'Giorno e notte', for example, two pictures portraying Mae West had no connection with the articles published in the column: they stood alone, the captions respectively reading 'Mae West com'è' and 'Mae West come appare'.³⁷ By highlighting the differences between the 'real' woman and the actress, they provide an example of how, in *Omnibus*, photographs were used to communicate as much as words.

Unlike other European and American general cultural illustrated magazines, in *Omnibus*

³⁴ Oreste Del Buono, 'La foto di Léon Blum che turbò Mussolini', *La Stampa-Tuttolibri*, 1 May 1993, p.5.

³⁵ Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, pp. 235–236.

³⁶ *Leo Longanesi: 1905–1957*, p. 267.

³⁷ The photos were published in the centre of the page, surrounded by the columns of two articles on cinema: one about the Soviet filmmaker 'Michele' [sic] Eisenstein, the other reviewing the Italian film *La fossa degli angeli* (Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, 1937). *Omnibus*, 4 December 1937, p. 9.

pictures were also used sarcastically. So, in two 1937 pieces, a photograph of two fat women became a representation of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the English army was mocked and portrayed against the background of a photograph of a flock of sheep, titled ‘Truppe inglesi’.³⁸ Sarcastic captions were used to express harsh judgements against democracies, as in the case of the already mentioned photographs of Eton boys published on 17 July 1937; or of a large photo at the centre of the cover page of the 2nd issue (17 April 1937), the top half portraying the British King’s crown and the bottom half portraying a poor Indian woman carrying two heavy bags, whose caption implicitly criticises British colonialism: ‘le Indie sotto la corona imperiale’.³⁹

Photographs were further used in other ways to express and stimulate criticism. By publishing images focused on what appear to be small details, *Omnibus* commented critically on current affairs in a subtle way that, according to Giuseppe Appella, ‘mira[va] a stimolare nel pubblico l’abitudine alla lettura critica del messaggio visivo. L’inquadratura [...] fissa[va] un atteggiamento, un dettaglio, un elemento apparentemente insignificante’.⁴⁰ On 23 October 1937, for example, on the cover page, the caption under a big photograph of old women with prayer books outdoor reads: ‘Gli ebrei di Londra, all’inizio del loro anno, contano i propri peccati e fanno penitenza sull’acqua del Tamigi, a Tower Bridge. Ecco alcune peccatrici che quest’anno, per colpa della Palestina, dovranno scontare pene maggiori’;⁴¹ once more, a photograph with no connection to the articles published on the page – in this case a piece praising Mussolini’s eloquence and a critique of France’s political parties – stands alone and delivers an independent message. In a short caption, the image denounces and negatively judges British policies in Palestine and the Jews’ support of the British rule. On 18 December 1937, *Omnibus* mocked the League of Nations with a photograph of a memorial dedicated to Woodrow Wilson in Geneva, titled ‘angolo morto’. The photo represents a perfect example of *Omnibus*’ subtle irony: at a first sight, the image could be seen as a simple photograph of a memorial, but the short caption adds an oblique meaning; without being explicit, the photo highlights the uselessness of the League of Nations.

³⁸ *Omnibus*, 16 October 1937, p.1; *Omnibus*, 11 December 1937, p. 1.

³⁹ *Omnibus*, 10 April 1937, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Leo Longanesi: 1905–1957*, p. 266.

⁴¹ *Omnibus*, 23 October 1937, p. 1.

Democracies were not the only target of *Omnibus*' critical use of pictures. On 12 June 1937, for example, a photo of a dog wandering alone in Guernica, destroyed by the Luftwaffe with the help of the Fascist airforce, denounced the violence of the bombing, the caption reading 'Il sopravvissuto di Guernica capitale basca'.⁴² This critique of Germany and Italy can be taken as an example of how *Omnibus* cannot simply be defined as a 'Fascist' – or 'non-Fascist' – magazine, as political and cultural ambivalence, and a general irony against current politics, seem to be prevailing over any political allegiance.

All these examples show how, in *Omnibus*, images were often used to criticise governments and societies, particularly mocking democracies such as France, Great Britain, and the United States, and showing their aggressive attitude and incompetence, but also on occasion Germany and Italy itself. At the same time, they were one of the main means of humour and entertainment in *Omnibus*, making it accessible also to a wide readership and, more importantly, made it an enjoyable *rotocalco* rather than an exclusively serious, literary journal – 'il giornale non è letterario, deve dare ai lettori qualcosa di semplice, e in cui esista una ossatura di verità', wrote Longanesi to writer Guglielmo Petroni in 1937.⁴³ Images differentiated *Omnibus* from any other periodical of the time, in their range, kind and variety of tone.

Illustrations and cartoons were also part of the entertainment offered by *Omnibus*. They were both used to amuse readers and as an ironic critique against political regimes and societies. For example, on 19 June 1937 a drawing of Stalin shooting a man serves to denounce Stalin's bloody dictatorship, whereas two comics on 2 October 1937 wittily accuse French women of being unfaithful and promiscuous.⁴⁴ Subtle messages were also directed to criticise aspects of Italian society: on 29 May 1937, while the Fascist government was putting much effort into the demographic campaign, *Omnibus* exalted a life without children, showing a peaceful image of a man and his wife taking a nap and enjoying a quiet Sunday afternoon, the caption reading

⁴² *Omnibus*, 12 June 1937, p. 5.

⁴³ Leo Longanesi: 1905-1957, p. 269.

⁴⁴ *Omnibus*, 19 June 1937, p. 2. The drawing accompanies a long article on Stalin's execution of the most prominent captain of the Red Army, together with high-ranking generals. *Omnibus*, 2 October 1937, p. 12. The promiscuity of French women is portrayed in *Omnibus*, 2 October 1937, p. 12: the captions read: 'Cose di Francia – "Adesso fatemi un neo Nuovo. Quello sulla coscia sinistra, ormai, lo sanno tutti a memoria"'; 'Cose di Francia – "Ehi giovanotto, non mi avrete mica preso per uno scemo! Piantatela di fare l'occhiolino a mia figlia!" – "Scusate: credevo che foste suo marito..."'.

‘domenica senza figli’.⁴⁵ On the same page, another cartoon denounces how going to the cinema had become an asset more valuable than a degree, highlighting the superficiality of modern Italian society: ‘Sì, è vero, non ho una laurea, ma ho una tessera per entrare gratis al cinema Orfeo’, says a man to a woman.⁴⁶ Another cartoon, published on 3 July 1937, exposes Italian society’s promiscuous habits: an old woman, comforting a young lady while she puts her make-up on, says: ‘Ma smettila di perdere il tuo tempo con quello sbarbatello di Giovannino! Dà retta a me, attaccati al commendatore: quello sì che ha intenzioni, serie, mica vuole sposarti...’.⁴⁷ Women were the dominant subject of *Omnibus*’ cartoons, particularly their promiscuous habits, as confirmed by a cartoon from 31 July 1937 portraying two half naked women talking to each other: ‘lui m’ha detto che mi vuole amare platonicamente. Cosa vuol dire?’ asks the first, ‘Non lo so: in ogni caso è meglio che ti cambi di biancheria’, answers the second.⁴⁸ These cartoons were mostly published on the last page – page 12 – and usually occupied the whole page, although from issue 20 (14 August 1937), they appeared next to or were substituted by photo-stories, that is to say photo-montages focused on a single event.⁴⁹

Consistent with the models set by *Life* and European photojournalism, photo-montages were another key-feature of *Omnibus*, and it was possibly the first Italian magazine to use the technique to deliver a story.⁵⁰ Photo-montages were used sarcastically in *Omnibus*, much as the single photographs discussed earlier, as is the case of a series of pictures that mocked the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, portrayed in unflattering poses.⁵¹ However, they were mainly used to deliver a story.⁵² On 9 October 1937, for example, a series of photos

⁴⁵ *Omnibus*, 29 May 1937, p. 12. On the Fascist battle of births see Lesley Caldwell, ‘Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in Fascist Policy’, in *Rethinking Italian Fascism: Capitalism, Populism and Culture*, ed. by David Forgacs (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), pp. 110–141; and Lauren E. Forcucci, ‘Battle for Births: The Fascist Pronatalist Campaign in Italy 1925 to 1938’, *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, 10.1 (2010), 4–13.

⁴⁶ *Omnibus*, 29 May 1937, p. 12.

⁴⁷ *Omnibus*, 3 July 1937, p. 12.

⁴⁸ *Omnibus*, 31 July 1937, p. 12.

⁴⁹ It is worth mentioning that the French *Marianne* also dedicated the last page to comic vignettes: ‘une page pour rire’. See, for example, *Marianne*, 5 April 1933, p. 13.

⁵⁰ As analysed in the next chapter, *Grazia* also used a series of photographs connected to each other that can be acknowledged as photocollages. However, they were not used to convey a message but merely to illustrate and explain the text, for example as instructions for posture training.

⁵¹ ‘L’allegro Signor Roosevelt’, *Omnibus*, 8 January 1938, p. 12.

⁵² The same feature can be observed in French and German magazines. See, for example, *Vu*, 6 February 1929, pp. 90–91; *Uhu*, July 1931, pp. 28–33. British and American magazines later reproduced a similar format (see chapter 1).

illustrated the Spanish Civil War, whereas on 1 January 1938 the entire page was dedicated to photos of Kaiser Wilhelm II at different stages of his life.⁵³ As in the latter case, many of these photo-montages were focused on the lives of important figures, such as royals or famous artists. On 15 January 1938, for example, the focus was on the last Tsar and his family, while on 26 February the protagonist was the royal House of Orange-Nassau.⁵⁴ Photo-stories were also dedicated to Italian personalities, such as Mussolini's son Bruno (29 January 1938) and Gabriele D'Annunzio (5 March 1938).⁵⁵ All these photo-stories followed the same biographical pattern, portraying the protagonists at various stages of their life and/or with different members of their families. In rare cases, such as the issue featuring the House of Orange-Nassau or the Spanish Civil War, the photos were accompanied by a column on the subject of the photos, but the page was most often exclusively dedicated to pictures.

Photo-stories were also used to share oddities and fun facts, such as the story of a man who looked like Napoleon I and spent his life dressed as the emperor (11 December 1937); or of a noble woman from New York whose daily life was 'riprodotta con un manichino'.⁵⁶ In other words, photo-montages could variously and creatively, either inform, entertain or as a form of sarcastic critique.

It is worth highlighting, finally, how many of these photo-stories were dedicated to America. On 16 October 1937, for example, a series of photographs of famous American women occupied the entire page – from the first policewoman to a theatre actress, from journalists to politicians –, whereas in the following issue (30 October) the first mall to abolish shop assistants is described as 'un "paradiso delle signore" a New York'.⁵⁷ On 13 November 1937, two photos of a man and a woman being tattooed, and a photo of a man whose body had been completely tattooed, are presented with the title 'Arte americana', while on 4 December the protagonist is the Far West, featuring photos of running horses in Texas, California, and a portrait of Buffalo Bill.⁵⁸ Although neither the photos of American women, nor the photos of tattooed men and woman are flattering, the strong presence of America reveals a particular attention paid by *Omnibus* to American

⁵³ *Omnibus*, 9 October 1937 and 1 January 1938, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Omnibus*, 15 January and 26 February 1938, p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Omnibus*, 29 January 1938 and 5 March 1938, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Omnibus*, 11 December 1937 and 12 March 1938, p. 12. The photographs used were taken from *Life*, 12 July 1937, and represent another example of both *Omnibus*' manipulation of foreign photo-hoots and news, and the attention paid to American magazines.

⁵⁷ *Omnibus*, 16 and 30 October 1937, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Omnibus*, 13 November and 4 December 1937, p. 12.

culture, an interest reflected in the literary content and particularly the section on cinema, which are the focus of the next section.

2. *Omnibus* on literature and cinema

As its subtitle suggested, *Omnibus* contained a mixture of political and cultural features, which, together with an extensive use of photographs and other images, created a heterogeneous and innovative magazine. According to Granata, it was indeed in the cultural elements that *Omnibus* ‘dimostrò [...] una certa spregiudicatezza, soprattutto nel linguaggio, e una certa dose di anticonformismo’,⁵⁹ making these possibly the most interesting pages of the magazine. This section focuses especially on the presence and treatment of literature and cinema in *Omnibus*, two sectors which seem to reflect more than others the influence of foreign cultures, and particularly demonstrate the prevalent position of American models, contradicting *Omnibus*’ own harsh critiques against democracies such as America and their societies, as regularly expressed in its political commentaries and, as already mentioned, in its ironic use of images. Between pages 6 to 10 of the standard issue format, *Omnibus* presented to its readers new books and film releases, commenting on the latest news from Hollywood and publishing novels serialised in episodes that covered various genres, from crime fiction to novels concerned with the moral and personal growth of their protagonists. This section will look in turn at these two areas, starting with literature in 2.1, with specific attention to translations and serialised novels.⁶⁰ Translations of Anglo-Saxon and particularly American literature, and the publication of original Italian novels inspired by American models, offer an interesting set of case studies for Italian-American synergies in *Omnibus*, and show how *Omnibus* looked beyond Italy and especially towards the United States, in spite of the regime’s policy of a cultural autarchy. The presence of this foreign literature in *Omnibus* reveals the cracks in the autarchy campaign and Fascist censorship in support of it and, more importantly perhaps, reflects and helped shape the taste of Italian readers for cosmopolitan forms culture.

⁵⁹ Granata, *L’Omnibus di Leo Longanesi*, p. 137.

⁶⁰ The literary criticism of ‘Il sofà delle muse’ has been left aside. This choice is based on the fact that, as far as foreign influence is concerned, the novels serialised in *Omnibus* seem to be more revealing than the reviews published in ‘Il sofà delle muse’.

2.1 Page 10, serialised novels and short stories

Literature played an important role in *Omnibus*.⁶¹ Every issue included several short stories, usually an original piece written by one of the magazine's regular collaborators or a translation from a foreign author, in addition to an episode of a novel which regularly appeared on page 10.⁶² Between April 1937 and January 1939, *Omnibus* published 16 novels, serialised in episodes throughout the 95 issues published; of those novels, six were by Italian authors and the remaining ten were translations: one from German, nine from English (all by American authors). The analysis of the novels, especially their genre and original language, acquires an added value if the regime's policies on censorship and the debate around translations are taken into account. The presence of American novels in particular, and translations from English in general, are striking in significance in the context of an increasing concern of the regime with print media in general, and growing attention to the periodical press. As already discussed in chapter 1, after the Ethiopian War and the League of Nations sanctions that followed, the Fascist government started to exercise stricter controls on the media and looked to Nazi Germany as an example. The presence of translations from a foreign culture in a popular magazine can thus be seen as a sign of both a strong presence of that culture in the popular imagination, and of a breach of the censorship system the regime was trying to impose on periodical press.

We can take as a sample the three novels serialised on page 10 in 1937. The first, published from 3 April to 19 June 1937, was *Tutta la verità sul caso Motta* by Mario Soldati, who, as mentioned in chapter 1, had already written a book on his experience in the United States in 1935, *America primo amore*.⁶³ *Tutta la verità sul caso Motta* provides a clear example of the influence of foreign, and specifically American, literature. Soldati's style as a writer appears to have been influenced by William Faulkner: as Silva Zangrandi notes, 'La lettura di Faulkner influenzò Soldati tanto che le analogie tra *La verità [sul caso Motta]* e il racconto *Black music* sono evidenti; in entrambi compaiono lettere, cronache di giornali, il lavoro investigativo

⁶¹ Literature was one of the key elements of *Marianne*, the foreign magazine whose structure and content deeply influenced the shaping of *Omnibus*. In *Vu* it is also possible to find American serialised novels, such as Mac Culley [sic], 'Le clown écarlate – Grand roman policier', *Vu*, 9 January to 6 February 1929 (Johnston McCulley, *The Crimson Clown*, 1927).

⁶² The only exception is the first issue, which had 16 pages in total and published the first episode of a novel on p. 13.

⁶³ Mario Soldati, *La verità sul caso Motta. Romanzo seguito da cinque racconti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1941).

della polizia'.⁶⁴ In the first serialised novel published by *Omnibus*, we can thus find strong connections with popular and experimental American literature, respectively in the structure of the novel as a crime fiction, and in its writing style.

The second novel to be serialised in page 10 was Dashiell Hammet's crime fiction *The Girl with the Silver Eyes* (translated as *La ragazza dagli occhi d'argento – romanzo poliziesco*), published between 26 June and 31 July 1937.⁶⁵ It is the first translation of an American novel in *Omnibus*.⁶⁶ The following novel is again a crime fiction, and this time the link to American influence is if anything more striking, not because it is a translation, but rather an Italian journalist writing a detective novel set in the United States: *L'ombrellino viola*, by Tito A. Spagnol, published between 14 August and 6 November 1937. The novel seems to be a direct product of American culture, even if the writing style is still traditional, meaning that the author does not experiment with new uses of the Italian language. Spagnol had lived in the United States working as a screenwriter, an experience which is constantly recalled in first-hand knowledge of the country in his novels, and which contributed to vivid and detailed descriptions of American life and places.⁶⁷ Spagnol also contributed to the magazine with other articles focused on the United States, becoming one of the most recurrent signatures in *Omnibus*.⁶⁸

The next novel serialised was one of the two non-crime novels published in 1937, and the only translation from a language other than English: a novella by Austrian author Joseph Roth, *Il capostazione Fallmerayer*, published from 13 November to 11 December 1937. It was followed by a novel written by the *New York Times*'s military editor Hanson W. Baldwin. The short work appeared in two episodes on 4 and 11 December, translated by Anna Cassina; it was based on documents on 'il più orribile naufragio che la storia della navigazione ricordi'.⁶⁹ Finally, 1937 ended with the opening episode of another work of crime fiction, with further episodes appearing until March 1938: *L'ispettore Bonaparte – romanzo poliziesco* by the Italian Carlo Marengo. The

⁶⁴ Silvia Zangrandi, "'Una caverna di delizie in una solitudine di orrore': pluralità di mondi, di linguaggi, di generi in "Tutta la verità sul caso Motta" di Mario Soldati", *Sincronie* 12.23 (2008), 165–179 (p. 174).

⁶⁵ Dashiell Hammett, 'The Girl with Silver Eyes', *Black Mask*, June 1924.

⁶⁶ The translator is unidentifiable.

⁶⁷ Jane Dunnett, 'The Emergence of a New Literary Genre in Interwar Italy', in *Italian Crime Fiction*, ed. by Giuliana Pieri (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 13–19.

⁶⁸ See for example Tito A. Spagnol, 'Avventura americana', in *Omnibus*, 17 April 1937, p. 9; Spagnol, 'Chiamata notturna', *Omnibus*, 12 June 1937, p. 7; 'L'emigrante', *Omnibus*, 24 July 1937, p. 5; Spagnol, 'La città dell'oro', *Omnibus*, 11 December 1937, p. 8.

⁶⁹ 'Il naufragio della Medusa', *Omnibus*, 4 December 1937, p. 10; and 11 December 1937, p. 10.

novel is set abroad, in France and Spain, and its protagonists are all foreigners, the only exception being the detective Luciano Paoli, born in Ajaccio and known as Bonaparte for his linkage to the emperor's family, thus ultimately of Italian origin. *L'ispettore Bonaparte* is a novel which reflected the Fascist regime's regulation of crime fiction, in which the 'good guy' is the only character with a link to Italy, due to his Italian heritage. Furthermore, it represents another example of 'contamination' of Italian literature by a foreign literary genre.

From this brief survey of serialised novels published on page 10 in 1937, it can be noted how out of a total of six, four of them were crime fiction (if we include *Soldati*) and three were translations (two from English, and one from German). This aspect is particularly interesting considering that in the second half of the 1930s the Fascist regime was committed to limit the circulation of crime fiction. Starting in 1937, the *Ministero della Cultura Popolare* approved a series of restrictions on the genre, from ordering that the culprit of the stories must not be Italian to finally banning crime fiction in 1943.⁷⁰

Between January 1938 and January 1939, the majority of novels serialised were again by foreign authors, with a prominent presence of American writers. There were only three novels by Italian authors, all three key figures in this generation of Italian literature: *I nemici* by Corrado Alvaro, *Gli anni perduti* by Vitaliano Brancati and *Lo strano viaggio di Domenico Molo* by Dino Buzzati (who wrote in *Omnibus* using the pseudonym Giovanni Drogo). The other seven novels published before the closure of the magazine were all by Americans: *La spilla* by William Faulkner, three crime novels by Ben Hecht – *Delitto senza passione*, *Il fantasma del Vecchio albergo* and *Sangue di attore* –, *Il campione* by Ring Lardner, *Le orecchie dell'orso* by John Steinbeck, and *I coniugi* by James T. Farrell.⁷¹ It is worth highlighting how, in 1938, crime fiction was not the predominant genre anymore; only Marengo and Hecht's novels are detective novels, whereas the others can be categorized as examples of the *Bildungsroman*. Nonetheless, it

⁷⁰ In July 1941, all serialised or periodical crime fiction was banned, see Circolare No. 7286, dated 5 July 1941, which forbade 'la pubblicazione dei libri gialli sia sotto forma di periodici che di dispense'; Christopher Rundle, *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 191 (see also pp. 192-193); 'Detective Fiction', *Encyclopaedia of Italian Literary Studies*, ed. by Gaetana Marrone, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2007), I, p. 632.

⁷¹ William Faulkner, *The Brooch* (1936); Ben Hecht, Charles MacArthur, *Crime Without Passion* (screenplay, 1934); Ben Hecht, *Actor's Blood* (1934); Ring Lardner, *Champion* (1916); John Steinbeck, *Johnny Bear* (1938). It was not possible to retrace the original title for Hecht's *Il fantasma del Vecchio albergo*, nor for Farrell's *I coniugi*, although the latter is possibly taken from the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy written between 1932 and 1935. The novels published in *Omnibus* are listed in Granata, 'L' "Omnibus" di Leo Longanesi', p. 130.

is worth dwelling on the presence and the impact of crime fiction as an Anglo-Saxon literary genre that deeply influenced Italian culture. The popularity of crime fiction is demonstrated by the sheer number of detective novels that circulated in popular magazines, *Omnibus* representing an emblematic example of this trend considering its distribution and its heterogeneity of styles and content. Moreover, Italian authors clearly adapted to the genre, sometimes emulating foreign authors or using an Anglo-Saxon structure or setting. This was the case with the already mentioned *Tutta la verità sul caso Motta* by Soldati, a novel that challenged the Fascist censorship and autarky not only for the influence of Faulkner, but also because it starts as a detective novel, a genre towards which the Fascist regime's tolerance was decreasing.⁷² Despite the fact that the Fascist regime considered crime novels as morally harmful, the majority of novels serialised in *Omnibus* were detective stories, or like Soldati's had elements of the genre, highlighting its popularity in Italy among both readers and writers.

Writing after the war, writer and former contributor to *Omnibus* Alberto Savinio provided an explanation both for the use of American or British settings for Italian crime novels, and the identification of the genre with these countries:

Il romanzo poliziesco è essenzialmente anglosassone. La metropoli inglese o americana, con i suoi bassifondi sinistri e popolati come gli abissi marini di mostri ciechi, le sue squadre di delinquenti disciplinati e militarizzati, le sue folle nere come l'acqua delle fogne, l'aspetto spettrale delle sue architetture, offre il quadro più favorevole, la messinscena più adatta al quadro del delitto. S'immagina male un romanzo poliziesco dentro la cinta daziaria di Valenza o di Mantova, di Avignone o di Reggio Emilia.⁷³

Spagnol, in his 1977 novel *La bambola insanguinata*, expressed a similar position:

[...] è solo merito della procedura penale anglo-sassone se esiste il romanzo poliziesco, specialità inglese e americana. Con la nostra procedura, i romanzieri avrebbero poco da esercitare la loro fantasia, giacché da noi, appena si sospetta qualcuno, lo si mette in prigione e allora addio intreccio romanzesco!⁷⁴

⁷² The campaign against translations did not impact on periodical publications until the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, when the regime directly attacked translations through the ban on crime fiction. See Dunnett, *The 'Mito Americano'*, pp. 271–379.

⁷³ Alberto Savinio, 'Romanzo poliziesco', *Souvenirs* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1976), p. 196, quoted in Jane Dunnett, 'The Appraisal of Detective Novels in 1930s Italy', *Modern Language Review*, 106.3 (2011), 745–764 (p. 754).

⁷⁴ Spagnol, *La bambola insanguinata* (Milan: Mondadori, 1977), p. 140.

However, what is even more striking than the influence of Anglo-Saxon crime fiction on Italian literature, is the general presence of American authors, and thus also Americanised language and even values in *Omnibus*. Short stories from American authors were commonly published both on page 10 and elsewhere: a survey of the 39 issues published in 1937, for example, reveals the presence of 25 novels and short stories. William Saroyan leads with three short stories, followed by James Cain and Richard Hughes with two short stories each, translated by different collaborators such as Emilio Ceretti, Elio Vittorini and Giulia Bragiotti. In general, the magazine seems to pay most attention to American and British writers, publishing authors such as D. H. Lawrence and other less known figures such as James Hilton, Manuel Komroff, and Albert Halper. Other languages also had a presence in the magazine. At least three short stories were translated from Chinese and signed by Alberto Moravia, and one Russian novel appeared translated by an elusive 'A. M.', perhaps Moravia again.⁷⁵

Omnibus not only introduced foreign authors to its readers, but also emerging Italian writers, some of whom published their very first writings in this magazine. The most relevant example are the short stories signed by Giovanni Drogo, a name that became famous in the 1940s as the protagonist of *Il deserto dei Tartari*. Using this pseudonym, Dino Buzzati not only signed the already mentioned *Lo strano viaggio di Domenico Molo*, but also two short stories published in 1937: 'Notizie false', and 'Il dolore notturno'.⁷⁶

Besides page 10, other literary features also appeared in *Omnibus*. The popularity and importance of literature for *Omnibus* is underlined by a contest launched in the 23rd issue (4 September 1937), which invited readers to send their short stories to the magazine, with the winners to be published on page 6. The first to appear was 'Il collegio femminile 1911', written by Anna Rossi Filangieri, 'il primo scritto prescelto del concorso permanente di *Omnibus*'.⁷⁷ This initiative can be seen as proof of *Omnibus*' multiple literary interests, reflecting its aim to be a cultured magazine, offering sophisticated but also popular new literature addressed to a wide range of readers. If on the one hand it promoted the work of popular authors— such as

⁷⁵ See Tien Ciun, 'A bordo del Dairen Maru – Racconto di Tien Ciun' and Lin Yu-Tang, 'Il generale Mangia-cane', *Omnibus*, 15 May 1937, p. 6 (both stories are translated by Alberto Moravia); Lu Hsun; 'La medicina – racconto cinese', *Omnibus*, 23 August 1937, p. 4; and M. Zoscenko, 'Protezione', *Omnibus*, 17 July 1937, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Giovanni Drogo, 'Notizie false', *Omnibus*, 22 May 1937, p. 9; 'Il dolore notturno', *Omnibus*, 2 October 1937, p. 5.

⁷⁷ See *Omnibus*, 4 September 1937, p. 6.

Saroyan and Cain – and encouraged readers to participate and challenge themselves to become writers, on the other hand it published sophisticated literary criticism in the column, ‘Il sofà delle muse’, in which critics such as Mario Praz, Il Tarlo (Emilio Cecchi), and Arrigo Benedetti discussed new books. This is the section which dedicated most space to Italian literature. It did, however, also treat other European and non-European culture, from Czech literature to the latest American books, presenting their readers with different writers and styles, different genres including poetry. In other words, throughout the reviews column, and the features containing short stories and novels, *Omnibus* introduced Italian audiences to an eclectic variety of new authors, new styles, and authors from overseas (and especially the United States), and contributed to the spread of both well known and new writers’ work.

The presence of literature in *Omnibus* confirms its wide scope but also its intense interest in American culture, which is even more evident in the regular feature on cinema, ‘Giorno e notte’, the focus of the next section.

2.2 ‘Giorno e notte’

Page 9 regularly hosted the section of *Omnibus* dedicated to cinema, ‘Giorno e notte’, which contained various aspects, from gossip to film reviews, to analyses of the film industry.⁷⁸ It was mainly written by Mario Pannunzio, author of film reviews for the column ‘Nuovi film’, and Antonietta Drago, author of a column focused on film production titled ‘Celluloide’.⁷⁹ Although ‘Giorno e notte’ was concerned with cinema in general, as in the literary sections, a particular focus on American films can be noted. Of the 39 ‘Giorno e notte’ sections published in 1937, for example, only one issue did not mention Hollywood, while nine were exclusively dedicated to the American film industry and American films.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ A similar page can be found in *Marianne*: ‘Ouvert la nuit’; the section is divided in two columns, ‘La semaine théâtrale’ and ‘La semaine à l’Ecran’.

⁷⁹ Detailed research on Antonietta Drago has not been carried out; there is even confusion over her real name. Montanelli and Staglieno consider Nenè Centonze to be her real name and Antonietta Drago her pseudonym. See Montanelli, Staglieno, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 324 and Granata, ‘L’ “Omnibus” di Leo Longanesi’, p. 130. Patrizia Guida claims the opposite. Her novels are signed with the name Antonietta Drago, as well as her articles written for *Omnibus*. See Patrizia Guida, *Scrittrici di Puglia* (Lecce: Congedo, 2008), pp. 128–133.

⁸⁰ See for example issue 23, in which *Giorno e Notte* is entirely dedicated to Charlie Chaplin: Jim Tully, ‘Charlot segreto’, *Omnibus*, 4 September 1937, p. 9. In this case, a long single article occupies page 9, with a big picture portraying Chaplin with Paulette Goddard at a tennis match. As noted earlier, the piece is a translation of Jim Tully’s first-hand piece on Charlot from *The New Movie Magazine*, and describes the star in his most human aspects, including his bad character, kindness and the difficulties he had to face in his life.

Consistent with the general format of the magazine, the reader's attention is first caught by pictures. Typically, two photographs, a close-up portrait of a film star and/or a publicity shot from a film, occupied most of the page. The articles were organised in columns as a frame, the *rubriche* divided to surround the photographs. Usually, the pictures were connected to the subject of the articles, a sort of visual reference which informs the reader of the column's content – with a few exceptions.

The articles on film stars, whose style recalled that of an American fan magazine, were largely focused on Hollywood and were the most distinctive feature of 'Giorno e notte'.⁸¹ They contained biographies or interviews that revealed details of film stars' private lives or commented on particular aspects of the filmmaking process. The main feature of these articles, however, which is rarely found in other contemporary publications, is the presence of fake reports from Hollywood, apparently written exclusively for *Omnibus* by an American correspondent. These reports were created by *Omnibus*' editorial staff, including pieces presented as autobiographies of film stars which even included the name of the Italian translator. Longanesi's collaborator Gino Visentini recalled later how they used to spend nights in the newsroom 'a fare interviste, finte, a Greta Garbo nella casa di Hollywood, oppure a Joan Crawford in studio, creando interviste all'americana, ma inventate di sana pianta da noi, con lo stile americano che deducevamo leggendo *Life*, altre riviste americane o francesi'.⁸² On 22 May 1937, for example, 'Giorno e notte' published an article signed by Carole Lombard in which the actress talks about her life, how she feels about herself and how she started her career. In another issue, on 12 June 1937, Gary Cooper narrates how he became a famous actor; elsewhere, James W. Bell describes Joan Crawford during a day in the country and Marlene Dietrich's private life, whereas Allen Alien reveals details of Greta Garbo's life out of the spotlight.⁸³ In May 1937, James W. Bell shares the memory of a winter spent in Dallas in 1935 when he met Jean

⁸¹ Another possible source for this aspect, alongside American models, were European magazines such as the British *Picturegoer* (London: Odhams, 1921 – 1960), which were of course already also influenced by US practice. Other examples include the German *Das Magazine* (see for example 'Premiere in Hollywood' and 'Drei Paar Beine, die die Welt eroberten', 31 November 1930, pp. 5286 – 5287 and p. 5363); and the French *Vu* (1 April 1931, entirely dedicated to Charlot).

⁸² Visentini, in *Parliamo di Longanesi*, p. 79.

⁸³ Carole Lombard, 'Autobiografia di Carole Lombard', *Omnibus*, 22 May 1937, p.5; Gary Cooper, 'Autobiografia di Gary Cooper', *Omnibus*, 12 June 1937, p. 9; James W. Bell, 'Joan Crawford in campagna', *Omnibus*, 1 May 1937, p. 9; James W. Bell, 'Marlene Dietrich in casa', *Omnibus*, 17 April 1937; Allen Alien, 'Greta Garbo in casa', *Omnibus*, 2 April 1937, p. 6.

Harlow's grandfather; he recalls her fondly telling him, 'Se andate nel West, fategli una visita; è un uomo ruvido mio nonno, ma se gli parlate di me, ve ne farete un amico'.⁸⁴

There is no clarity about who was behind these articles, or if they contained any elements of truth, as no research carried out until now has clarified the identity of James W. Bell, Allen Alien or F. James Smith. They were most likely the pseudonyms used by the editorial staff to sign their fake correspondences, as mentioned by Visentini.⁸⁵ Apart from the questions of authorship and authenticity, it is crucial for the impact of *Omnibus* that the articles on film stars read as if the author were part of the scene, and the impression the reader gets is that the author is a friend of the star (or the star herself) and is sharing his privileged, intimate point of view or at least information with the reader. Not every piece expressed close familiarity with the film star. In the case of an article on Carole Lombard, there is no sign of a close friendship with the actress; James W. Bell describes the scene as if he were part of it, but the piece is shaped more like an interview than a confidential conversation. Another example is given by two articles, on Marlene Dietrich and Carole Lombard respectively, in which the writer is present but there is no explicit interaction with the protagonists.⁸⁶ In both cases, these articles are remarkably similar to those published in American fan magazines such as *Photoplay* (Chicago: Macfadden, 1911 – 1980), and thus point to the influence on *Omnibus* of and its occasional direct sourcing in American film fan magazines, as stated by Visentini.

The articles on film stars were not only aimed to bring Hollywood stars closer to the readers, but also to reveal how, out of the spotlight, they were not as glamorous as they appeared on the screen. As we shall see, although generally praising Hollywood, *Omnibus* also focused on exposing the differences between Hollywood and reality and so in some ways demystifying it. An article on Greta Garbo, for example, reveals the flaws of the popular actress, highlighting the differences between the actress and the woman: Allen Alien discloses how Garbo is in real life,

⁸⁴ James W. Bell, 'Il nonno di Jean Harlow', *Omnibus*, 8 May 1937. The articles signed by Bell specify: 'Copyright by "Hollywood New Inc.", e, per l'Italia, di "Omnibus"'. The same caption appears at the end of the article on Greta Garbo signed by Allen Alien. A different name appears under an article on Gloria Swanson but, although it does not have the usual caption on copyright, the writing style and the structure of the article is consistent with the others. See F. James Smith, 'Le idee di Gloria Swanson', *Omnibus*, 10 July 1937, p. 9.

⁸⁵ One of the main creators of fake reports from Hollywood was Zavattini, who contributed to *Omnibus* and regularly wrote for *Cinema Illustrazione*, signing his articles with different pseudonyms. Some of the stories he invented on Hollywood stars for *Cinema Illustrazione* are collected in Cesare Zavattini, *Cronache da Hollywood* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996).

⁸⁶ James W. Bell, 'Marlene Dietrich in casa', *Omnibus*, 17 April 1937, p. 11; 'Carole Lombard in cucina', *Omnibus*, 24 April 1937, p. 6.

describing how she spends most of her free time at home, reading books, and seems to be a lunatic lonely woman who would benefit from the presence of a man, although, the writer reflects, ‘chi delle due amerebbe il suo uomo, l’attrice che lo schermo rende tanto bella e affascinante [...] o la donna che essa è veramente, dal fisico sgraziato?’.⁸⁷ This attitude frequently characterised the pieces on Hollywood’s everyday life, which revealed uncommon details on stars, and did not follow the usual exaltation of actresses, suggesting a new side of the star system. As Antonella Andreoli puts it, ‘rovesciato il divismo, ne viene proposta un’immagine insolita’.⁸⁸

Film stars and details on their lives were not the only element of ‘Giorno e Notte’. As already mentioned, two other columns were included in the page dedicated to the film industry: ‘Nuovi film’, and ‘Celluloide’.

‘Nuovi film’ was dedicated to new releases and was written by Pannunzio, who would later become one of the most influential journalists in post-war Italy. At the beginning, his column focused only on foreign films, and it was only after six months – seventeen issues – that he reviewed an Italian film. The most notable feature of Pannunzio’s column was that it did not limit itself to a mere review of the latest films: writing about a new release was an excuse to make remarks on other more general and analytical matters. Pannunzio analyses film as a form of artistic expression, looks at the audience attending the cinema, or discusses the impact of a specific genre on the wider society.

A good example is Pannunzio’s review of the American film *Public Enemy's Wife* (*La moglie del pericolo pubblico* – directed by Nick Grinde, 1936), in which the critic uses the opportunity offered by the latest gangster film to state that the gangster genre has had its time, and that people had grown tired of it. He also reflects on cinema in general, noting that ‘Il cinema ha forse, più di ogni altra arte, il potere di far partecipare lo spettatore alla vicenda rappresentata, quasi fosse un vero e proprio personaggio’.⁸⁹ In the previous issue, on 26 June 1937, reviewing *The Lady of Secrets* (*Il peccato di Lilian Day*, directed by Marion Gering, 1936), the writer tears apart the director, and her alleged incompetence is a cause for reflection on the (negative) role of women in the arts.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Allen Alien, ‘Greta Garbo in casa’, *Omnibus*, 10 April 1937.

⁸⁸ Andreoli, *Leo Longanesi*, p. 112. On Fascist Italy’s star system see also Gundle, *Mussolini’s Dream Factory*.

⁸⁹ Pannunzio, ‘La moglie del pericolo pubblico’, *Omnibus*, 3 July 1937, p. 9.

⁹⁰ ‘Il peccato di Lilian Day’, *Omnibus*, 26 June 1937, p. 13.

Pannunzio's criticisms were also directed towards Italian national productions. One example is represented by his harsh opinion on the *telefoni bianchi*, Hollywood-influenced comedy films, a very popular genre among Italian audiences that he describes as a failed product: 'come quei giocattoli che poi si vendono a minor prezzo [...] ogni opera ripete gli sbagli della precedente e tutte sembrano sortite dalla medesima mano o, meglio ancora, dalla medesima macchina che sembra abbia negli ingranaggi qualche rotella guastata'.⁹¹ In a piece dedicated to *La fossa degli angeli*, directed by Carlo L. Bragaglia, he criticises the poor direction of the film but also describes in detail a night at the cinema. This detailed account of what happened during the screening is functional to his criticism of the director and actors, but at the same time it provides the reader with a vivid portrait of the audience of the day and, therefore, possibly also of the readership of the magazine. Pannunzio describes spectators as enjoying Walt Disney's short animated cartoon, annoyed by the advertisements but excited at viewing a trailer; he pictures the scene when the lights come on again, as he sees that more than half of the people left before the end of the screening. The article ends with a bitter reflection: 'che tristezza queste serate'.⁹² In other words, Pannunzio denounces the emptiness of nights spent at the cinema, watching pointless films that are less exciting than a film trailer. Furthermore, he criticises the Italian film and its director, which could not even compete with Disney's short animation.

The Italian audience was also the object of Pannunzio's disapproval in his review of the American film *They Won't Forget* – directed by Mervyn LeRoy and released in Italy with the Italian title *Vendetta* in 1938 – where he highlights the ignorance and superficiality of Italian audiences, who saw the film as a *giallo*, failing to understand the deep meaning of a film that he sees as condemning the racist, cruel reality of America.⁹³

A strict limitation on the distribution and screening of American films was approved by the regime in 1938, but the role and future of Italian film production was already being debated well before then, and Pannunzio contributed to the debate through his articles for 'Nuovi film'. An example of this is a piece from 1 May 1937. Reviewing a French film directed by Julien Duvivier, *La Belle équipe* (*La bella compagnia*, 1936), he bitterly highlights the poor quality of European productions, and reveals how, even in a good film by an experienced director, 'tiri di

⁹¹ 'I volontari della noia', *Omnibus*, 21 January 1939, p. 9.

⁹² 'La fossa degli angeli', *Omnibus*, 4 December 1937, p. 9.

⁹³ 'Vendetta', *Omnibus*, 14 May 1938, p. 9.

solito una cert'aria, un'aria particolarmente irrespirabile, che ha qualche somiglianza, per esempio, con quella che si avvertiva negli stabilimenti della vecchia Cines'.⁹⁴ He concludes: 'quando anche nelle opere migliori [...] voi vedete quell'incertezza, quel fare impacciato, quella povertà nelle invenzioni e nel racconto, non potete non provare una specie di malessere e una sfiducia senza limiti per le sorti di questo povero cinema europeo'.⁹⁵ In Pannunzio's opinion, the decline of Italian cinema is thus part of a wider impoverishment of European cinema, unable to compete with the professional organisation demonstrated by Hollywood.

Overall, the number of American films reviewed in 'Nuovi film' is higher than all other national productions, and in most of Pannunzio's articles Hollywood emerges as a model to follow.⁹⁶ His review of *Luciano Serra pilota*, directed by Goffredo Alessandrini in 1938, clearly confirms his view. *Luciano Serra pilota* was a major film co-authored and supervised by Vittorio Mussolini, the Duce's son, and represents a clear example of the impact of the American model on Italian culture. According to Vittorio Mussolini, in order to flourish the Italian film industry should have followed the example set by Hollywood: 'sarebbe pericoloso e dannoso per la rinascite industria cinematografica italiana l'accordarsi alla produzione europea, invece di cercar la via e il metodo per eguagliare quella americana', he declared in 1936.⁹⁷ *Luciano Serra pilota* reflects Vittorio Mussolini's aim to imitate Hollywood, as Gallagher notes, paraphrasing Vittorio Mussolini: 'airplanes correspond to the 7th cavalry, the Ethiopians to the Indians. Errol Flynn could be substituted for Amedeo Nazzari without changing anything'.⁹⁸ According to Tannenbaum, thanks to its humble protagonist who in the end chooses to do the 'right thing', *Luciano Serra pilota* is a successful propaganda film which made Italians identify with the protagonist and relate to his patriotic choice. In other words, Serra is supposed to represent an

⁹⁴ 'La bella compagnia', *Omnibus*, 1 May 1937, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See Francesco Bolzoni, *Sull'Omnibus di Longanesi* (Rome: Centro sperimentale per la cinematografia, 1996), p. 105.

⁹⁷ Vittorio Mussolini, 'Emancipazione del cinema italiano', *Cinema*, 25 September 1936, pp. 213. On Vittorio Mussolini's view on film production and, in general, cinema as a form of artistic expression, see also Vittorio Mussolini, 'In cerca della formula', *Cinema*, 10 February 1937, pp. 87–88. Vittorio shared Pannunzio's views on cinema and was involved in film production and in 1937 was trying to form a partnership with the Hollywood producer Hal Roach, a partnership that failed for political reasons. On the topic see Richard Lewis Ward, *A History of the Hal Roach Studios* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 100.

⁹⁸ Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), p. 49. See also Dario Zanelli, 'Quando Mussolini dirigeva "Cinema"' in *Il neorealismo nel fascismo. Giuseppe De Santis e la critica cinematografica 1941–1943*, ed. by Mariella Furno and Renzo Renzi (Bologna: Tipografia Compositori, 1984), pp. 105–108.

ordinary man who in the end chooses patriotism and thus Fascism. Nonetheless, for Tag Gallagher, ‘neither [Luciano’s] going to Ethiopia nor his attempt to help the downed flyer has any connection with the national effort, let alone with the Fascist Party’.⁹⁹

Propaganda film or not, Pannunzio believed that in its innovative approach to film-making, *Luciano Serra pilota* finally showed the direction the Italian film industry should take:

un film come *Luciano Serra pilota* può insegnare molte cose, essendo un’opera ch’è riuscita non solo a scordare le vecchie strade piene di polvere seguite dai più, ma a segnarne di nuove, che si confanno all’indole del nostro pubblico, annoiato di tante nostre commedie sentimentali e insensate, di tanti capricci in dialetto, di tante avventure modeste di tranquilli eroi.¹⁰⁰

The film is one of the most successful attempts made by the Italian film industry to imitate Hollywood, for Pannunzio, and this is one of the few positive reviews of Italian films in ‘Nuovi film’.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the film also offers an example of how American models could be Italianised and used to disseminate national (Fascist) values.

The third section of ‘Giorno e notte’, ‘Celluloide’, was written by Antonietta Drago and also made the American film industry the main focus of its attention. It put together foreign newspaper cuttings that showed readers what was behind a film’s production, from funding to production. The subject was cinema in general, not only American, but also European and Soviet, although the main focus remained on Hollywood. The most distinctive characteristic of ‘Celluloide’ is the attention it paid to practical aspects of the industrial organisation of film production, and in some cases the column consisted of short articles on a specific aspect of the process. On 10 July 1937, for example, the article ‘Proibito’ explains the problem Hollywood studios had to face because of their own country’s censorship practices and the nationalistic policies adopted by importing countries that protected national film industries from the massive quantity of American products, highlighting specific features of international film industries, from Singapore to Scandinavia, and anticipating the Fascist regime’s restriction on American imports to Italy approved shortly after.¹⁰² While the Fascist regime was working towards the control of

⁹⁹ Gallagher, *The Adventures*, pp. 49–50.

¹⁰⁰ Pannunzio, ‘Luciano Serra pilota’, *Omnibus*, 1 January 1939.

¹⁰¹ See Pannunzio, ‘I condottieri’, *Omnibus*, 9 October 1937, and ‘Scipione’, 6 November 1937.

¹⁰² Antonietta Drago, ‘Proibito’, *Omnibus*, 10 July 1937, p. 9.

film distribution and screening, which led to the approval of the so-called *legge Alfieri* and the institution of the state monopoly on the import of foreign film, *Omnibus* kept focusing on Hollywood, in contrast to the regime's promotion of Italian productions.¹⁰³ As much as in Pannunzio's reviews, Hollywood seems to be for Drago the principal point of reference for (good) filmmaking. In 1937, for example, there were three articles dedicated to Soviet film production – published on 22 May, 25 September, and 4 December respectively – and although these articles inform the reader of the state of Soviet cinema in general, concentrating on organisation and funding, even in this case Drago refers to the American film industry as a model:

Se volgiamo lo sguardo agli stabilimenti e ai quadri dell'industria, il panorama è ancora più triste. Circa quattro anni fa, Sciumiatski, di ritorno da un viaggio di studi e di piacere a Hollywood, decisa la costruzione a Jalta, in Crimea, di una Hollywood sovietica. [...] Ebbene, sono già due anni che quegli stabilimenti sono in grado di funzionare, e nemmeno un film è uscito ancora da questa caricatura di Hollywood.¹⁰⁴

The attention paid by Drago to specific and technical aspects of film production worldwide contributes to making 'Celluloide' a column comparable to material in specialist cinematographic magazines, such as *Cinema* (Milan: Hoepli, 1936 – 1956). However, the tone of Drago's articles is consistent with the general sharp and lively tone used in *Omnibus*, and in line with Pannunzio's critical reviews. Some pieces, for example, are used to highlight what is seen as ridiculous or negative aspects of film production, such as the system of American censorship created by Will H. Hays, which led to a controversy between the Hays office and Warner Bros about a short film on 'l'arte di indossare le calze', or the already mentioned failures of the Soviet film production to emulate Hollywood.¹⁰⁵ What emerges in 'Celluloide' is a deeply ambivalent attitude to America: Hollywood is praised and considered a model for film production, therefore challenging Fascist censorship, but at the same time it is also ridiculed, echoing Fascist anti-American rhetoric that was also a feature of several other parts of *Omnibus*.

Overall, 'Giorno e Notte' provides a clear example of *Omnibus*' sustained, but contradictory fascination with America. The articles dedicated to film stars were inspired by American magazines, and some of them were – or pretended to be – translations of original

¹⁰³ See R.D.L. 16 June 1938, nr 1061, and R.D.L. 4 September 1938, nr 1389.

¹⁰⁴ Drago, 'Guai Sovietici', *Omnibus*, 25 September 1937, p.9. See also 'La geografia di Platone Kerzhenstev', *Omnibus*, 22 May 1937, p. 5; and 'Redenzione di Eisenstein', *Omnibus*, 4 December 1937, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; Drago, 'Parole tabù' and 'L'arte di infilarsi le calze', *Omnibus*, 1 May 1937, p. 9.

American articles, and contributed to the spreading of a fascination with the Hollywood star system in Italy. Moreover, 'Giorno e Notte' also confirms the complexity of perspectives in *Omnibus*: the critical film reviews by Pannunzio and the comment pieces by Drago were consistent with the cultured tone of the magazine, but the strong presence of articles on film stars that read like a gossip column made 'Giorno e Notte' also a popular culture section. Together, they created a mixture of a popular side and an aspiration to serious cultural comment where the American model of the fan magazine coexisted with sophisticated or expert critique, making these two 'cultures' available for everyone. Moreover, in 'Giorno e notte' American culture can be found not only as the main subject of the articles, but also as a model for the column's layout, influenced by the American fan magazines, with film stars' photographs and big, catchy titles attracting the readers' attention.

2.3 *Omnibus*' ambivalent images of America

As examined earlier, through literature and films, translated articles and comics, American culture was a constant presence in *Omnibus*. However, if we draw together the different images of America disseminated throughout the magazine, a deeply ambivalent attitude to American culture stands out. This is also reflected in the different generations amongst the contributors to *Omnibus*. Authors such as Elio Vittorini, Mario Praz, Alberto Moravia, Giaime Pintor, Mario Soldati, and Emilio Cecchi (Il Tarlo), who collaborated as translators from English and/or writers of original pieces with links to America, also contributed to the dissemination of an ambivalent image of America in late 1930s Italy. These authors were part of two different generations with different attitudes and ideas as far as American culture was concerned: authors such as Praz and Cecchi were sceptical of prevalent myths of America, whereas figures such as Vittorini, Pintor, and Soldati perceived America and a certain new American literature as a powerful symbolic presence that conditioned their own work.

A comparison between articles about Hollywood and pieces on American society clearly reveals *Omnibus*' ambivalence towards the United States. On the one hand, as already noted, Hollywood was praised and represented as a model to follow; on the other hand, articles and photographs about America in the sections on politics and foreign affairs were mostly critical of American culture and society. In the third issue of 1938, for example, a translation of a short story by William Saroyan – *L'uomo col cuore negli altopiani* – is published in columns

surrounding a photograph entitled ‘documenti americani’, which portrays a woman kissing a dead man in a coffin; the caption reads: ‘Elena Wills Love, di anni 31 accusata di avere ucciso il suo amante, mentre bacia la vittima nella bara’.¹⁰⁶ Consistent with *Omnibus*’ use of images, the photograph stands alone and delivers an implicit message denouncing the violence and hypocrisy of American women. There is no connection with Saroyan’s short story, a tale about the encounter of a poor American family with an old actor travelling across the United States whose heart belongs to Scotland, offering a clear example of contradictory images of America: the space dedicated to American literature, implicitly approved, is counterbalanced by an image condemning American society, depicted in *Omnibus* as violent, hypocritical and barbarian, clearly echoing the Fascist regime’s rhetoric.

Once more, photographs play a crucial role in accusing and revealing hidden aspects of American society, as here or in a photo-story on President Roosevelt, who was portrayed in grotesque and denigrating poses that undermined his credibility.¹⁰⁷ Overall, throughout *Omnibus*, America is presented as two separate, co-existing realities: the sparkling world of Hollywood and its stars, a fake world made of life-changing opportunities which can turn a simple secretary into a wealthy wife, contrasted with the ‘real’ face of America, as greedy and violent.

Omnibus’ ambivalent feelings towards America can be traced even in positive reviews of films such as *Gold Diggers*, in which Pannunzio praised the American actors – ‘Gli attori [...] giocano su una recitazione esatta, precisa, realistica’ – but depicted American women and American society in general as immoral: ‘traspare anzi qua e là quella frenetica, angosciata, brutale sete di danaro, ch’è propria degli americani, e che a malapena è velata da un candore e un’ingenuità superficiali’.¹⁰⁸ Gossip articles on film stars were also used to spread negative images of American society. An article signed by James W. Bell, for example, reflects on how the majority of Hollywood stars claim to come from poor families and disadvantaged backgrounds – ‘ogni attrice è una Becky Sharp e ogni attore un Oliviero [sic] Twist [...] i genitori, le madri, i padri e gli zii degli attori, sembrano uscire tutti dalla penna di Zola’. According to Bell, the reason behind the unfortunate events that characterised a star’s childhood was the American fascination with ‘gli eroi che salgono alla gloria dalla strada’, a myth that

¹⁰⁶ William Saroyan, ‘L’uomo col cuore negli altopiani’, transl. by Elio Vittorini, and ‘Documenti americani’, *Omnibus*, 15 January 1938.

¹⁰⁷ ‘L’allegro Signor Roosevelt’, *Omnibus*, 21 August 1937.

¹⁰⁸ Pannunzio, ‘Cercatrici d’oro’, *Omnibus*, 22 May 1937.

suggested that anyone could become famous.¹⁰⁹ Bell explains that ‘ciò ha la sua ragione sociale, il suo segreto commerciale: ed è che agli americani [...] piacciono gli eroi *self-made* [...] [ed] è un’ambizione postuma di tutti i ricchi, quella di essere stati poveri’; accordingly, ‘la Crawford era una dattilografa e viveva in una soffitta’, and Marlene Dietrich had to sold her precious violin, a gift from her father who had died in the Great War, in order to save her ill mother.¹¹⁰ In other words, by revealing how Hollywood starts claimed to come from a poor background just to appeal to the public, Bell highlights the hypocrisy of both Hollywood and the American society, in which rich people show a false modesty.

In short, although with some hints of ambivalence, *Omnibus* celebrated Hollywood, but American society as a whole condemned.

3. Conclusion

In the final issue of *Omnibus*, published on 28 January 1939, an article by the magazine’s drama critic Alberto Savinio on Leopardi prompted the intervention of the Fascist censors and the closure of the magazine. Although in the official documents the reason for the closure of *Omnibus* is clearly stated – ‘mi è stato comunicato l’ordine di sospensione di *Omnibus* per un articolo a firma Alberto Savinio riguardante Leopardi a Napoli’, Longanesi wrote to Alfieri on 2 February – ¹¹¹ there are three different theories for the exact cause. The first states that *Omnibus* was closed because Savinio offended one of Italy’s greatest poets, Giacomo Leopardi.¹¹² The second version, which is the most corroborated, suggests that Savinio offended the *prefetto* of Naples and his wife by calling them ‘donkeys’: Savinio criticised the closure of the famous *bar Gambrinus* not knowing it had been decided by the prefect himself, who expressed his indignation to Mussolini, who in turn ordered the closure of *Omnibus*.¹¹³ The last interpretation originates from Francesco Bolzoni, who in his study of *Omnibus* suggests that it was in fact Savinio’s allusion to ‘uno sbrindellato reparto di soldati in partenza per la Macedonia [...] che, al

¹⁰⁹ James W. Bell, ‘La rettorica di Hollywood’, *Omnibus*, 30 October 1937.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Letter written by Leo Longanesi addressed to Alfieri, ACS, MCP, b. 119, f. 735 ‘Leo Longanesi’.

¹¹² In the article Savinio, with unflattering words, stated that Leopardi died of an indigestion caused by ice-cream: ‘una leggera colite che i napoletani chiamano “*a cacarella*”’; Alberto Savinio, ‘Il sorbetto di Leopardi’, *Omnibus*, 28 January 1939, p. 3.

¹¹³ Massimo Alberini, ‘“Omnibus” la vita e la morte del famoso settimanale di Longanesi’, *La Gazzetta di Parma*, 15 September 1982, reproduced in Granata, ‘L’ “Omnibus” di Leo Longanesi’, pp. 205–206.

modo di una dispettosa fotografia, fermava la voracità e la sconsolata miseria di fantaccini che ci si preparava a inviare di nuovo al fronte'¹¹⁴ which caused the intervention of the censors.¹¹⁵ According to this version, then, the derision by Savinio of the Italian navy was the real reason behind the forced closure of *Omnibus*: 'La maggior divoratrice di gelati è la marina da guerra'.¹¹⁶ Whichever is the correct version, each one shows how, in spite of the margin of freedom of expression periodicals enjoyed compared to newspapers, the Minculpop was ready to intervene and suspend a magazine for the smallest offence to grandeur of Italy's prestige or power.

After being notified of the government's measure against *Omnibus*, Longanesi tried to appeal directly to Mussolini and delay the closure, in order to 'poter dimostrare al Capo del Governo che *Omnibus* non ha nessun indirizzo discordante dalle direttive del Regime'.¹¹⁷ On 2 February 1939, however, the final measure against Longanesi was approved in a letter from Alfieri to the prefect of Milan: 'Prego V. E. disporre che settimanale "Omnibus" edito Rizzoli-Milano sospenda sue pubblicazioni per revoca riconoscimento del gerente responsabile Leo Longanesi causa atteggiamento tenuto dal periodico in questi ultimi tempi'.¹¹⁸ Even Angelo Rizzoli tried to intercede to save *Omnibus*: 'L'Editore Rizzoli, che deve rientrare a Milano, insiste per essere ricevuto oggi da Sua Eccellenza Alfieri, cui vorrebbe parlare del cambio della gerenza di "Omnibus", onde evitare a tutti un danno generale'.¹¹⁹ In spite of these attempts, Mussolini's decision was final and *Omnibus* was never published again. However, as early as March 1939, another magazine published by Rizzoli, *Tutto*, appeared on the newsstands showing a new look clearly inspired by *Omnibus* although this again brought the intervention of the Minculpop:

E' uscito in questi giorni il primo numero della serie interamente rinnovata del settimanale "Tutto". "Tutto" [...] è divenuto dopo questa trasformazione una copia sfacciata del soppresso settimanale "Omnibus": identica è l'impaginazione del nuovo foglio, identico lo stile ottocentesco dei titoli e delle fotografie, identici le rubriche ed i collaboratori (fra i quali è Alberto Moravia, [...] e [...] Mario Missiroli). Il direttore responsabile di "TUTTO" è inoltre [...] Andrea Rizzoli, il quale evidentemente ha assunto la gerenza del settimanale per eliminare formalmente il nome del vecchio direttore Leo Longanesi.

¹¹⁴ Savinio, 'Il sorbetto di Leopardi', p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Bolzoni, *Sull'Omnibus di Longanesi*, pp. 109–110.

¹¹⁶ Savinio, 'Il sorbetto di Leopardi', p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Letter written by Leo Longanesi addressed to Mussolini, ACS, MCP, b. 119, f. 735 'Leo Longanesi'.

¹¹⁸ 'Telegramma N. 16 indirizzato a Prefetto Milano', 2 February 1939, *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Appunto* for Alfieri, author unknown, ACS, MCP, b. 119, f. 735 'Leo Longanesi'.

“Tutto” costituisce insomma un’evidentissima seconda edizione di “Omnibus” e perciò una palese contravvenzione all’ordine di soppressione di questo settimanale dato pochissime settimane or sono dal Ministro della cultura popolare.

Il fatto è stato subito notato ed ampiamente commentato non solo negli ambienti giornalistici e letterari, ma anche dal pubblico il quale vede in esso un segno della sopravvivenza di certi giornalisti sordamente ostili al Fascismo.¹²⁰

After its forced closure *Omnibus* continued to play a role in the Italian periodical press, not only as a model emulated, as with *Tutto* and, after the war, *L’Espresso* and *Il Mondo*, founded by Benedetti and Pannunzio respectively, but also as an experience that was a profoundly formative one for many of the writers and intellectuals who went on to shape post-war Italian journalism.

Although, as discussed in this chapter, foreign elements, both European and American, can be easily traced in *Omnibus*, Longanesi nevertheless created a magazine which had its own distinctive Italian features and reflected – directly and indirectly – specific aspects of Italian culture: the Fascist regime and its rhetoric; Italians’ fascination with Hollywood and American culture; and Italian habits, commented and interpreted through the sarcastic lenses of Longanesi.

As already noted, *Omnibus* is often referred to as the first Italian *rotocalco*. Rizzoli had already produced and printed magazines using the rotogravure printer, with *Novella* possibly representing the earliest and most successful example. What made *Omnibus* a prototype of the modern *rotocalco*, then, was not so much or not only its use of the printing technology used, but rather its innovative use of photographs and other images, and its heterogeneous mix of serious analyses and entertainment, which allowed it to appeal to potentially any kind of reader with cultural or political interest, or just looking for diversionary entertainment, from housewives to intellectuals. In other words, *Omnibus* reflects and in many ways created for the Italian context the idea of the *rotocalco* as a general magazine for a wide readership covering different topics, from current affairs to culture. Reaching as many readers as possible, a sense of the market of readers in an expanding sector, is probably the main feature that shaped the modern *rotocalco*, an aspect that also characterised *Grazia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1938 -), one of the first modern *rotocalchi* for women, analysed in the following chapter.

¹²⁰ *Appunto* of the Minculpop dated 14 March 1939. Ibid.

IV. AN IDEAL MAGAZINE FOR THE IDEAL WOMAN. *GRAZIA* (1938 – 1943)

Nella lista di tali giornali [da sopprimere] è stato erroneamente incluso il settimanale *Grazia*, il quale mi sembra si stacchi in modo netto da quel genere di varietà che giustamente si è voluto far scomparire dalla stampa periodica italiana. *Grazia* infatti è nata come una pubblicazione per la donna italiana e per la famiglia, nata anche per fare la concorrenza alle tre riviste francesi similari – *Marie Claire*, *Votre Bonheur* e *Confidences* – che in Italia vendono migliaia di copie alla settimana.

Arnoldo Mondadori.¹

1. Introduction

1.1 The Italian women's *rotocalchi* and the Fascist regime

The changes brought to the periodical press by rotogravure printing, which we have seen at work in the case of *Omnibus*, also had a profound effect on the sector of women's magazines. As seen above, the very first popular magazine to be published and shaped as a *rotocalco* was Rizzoli's *Novella* in 1927 and following this, it was in the 1930s that women's periodical press experienced a dynamic new phase of development. The sector was indeed particularly affected by the use of the rotogravure, as it stimulated widespread and for the first time differentiated production of magazines offering different content according to the different kinds of women readers targeted. The new *rotocalchi* expanded the readership, marking the beginning of a mass market in Italy for women's periodicals, itself part of the new mass culture that was emerging during the Fascist era,

¹ Quoted in Patrizia Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia" tra innovazione e informazione', in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano*, p. 236.

in some ways shaped by Fascism itself.²

In the nineteenth century, and before the advent of the rotogravure printing technique, women's periodicals were mainly dedicated to fashion and arts, and aimed at upper classes. From the 1920s a few magazines started to include some more popular content, like articles on sport and cinema, albeit maintaining an elegant look and still focussing on arts and literature.³ In the 1930s, women's *rotocalchi* distinguished themselves from these periodicals for their frequency of publication, number of pages, and quality of paper, as well as content: *rotocalchi* had fewer pages, used a lower quality paper and were published weekly, whereas earlier periodicals, such as *Lidel* and *Sovrana*, used glossy paper, had many pages, and were published monthly. These differences were also reflected in the price – a single issue of a women's *rotocalco* was cheaper than other women's periodicals – and the intended readership for the new magazines was clearly extended also to aim at middle class, 'ordinary' women.⁴ The new formula of the *rotocalco* always followed three principles, *evasione*, *amenità*, *consigli*, consistent with its aim to entertain and advise its readers and reach a wide range of classes, from lower middle class to women of the haute bourgeoisie.⁵

The success of women's *rotocalchi* was not only due to the technical and commercial printing innovations described in chapter 1, but was also the result of decades of history of development and refinement of women's periodicals. If in the nineteenth century, Franchini and Soldani note that the magazines aimed to shape 'una donna nuova per una nuova idea di famiglia e di società',⁶ similarly in the 1930s the new weeklies suggested models for a 'new woman', which now reflected Fascist precepts but were not limited to it. Indeed, as will be seen in the

² Ibid., p. 75; Laura Lilli, 'La stampa femminile', in *La stampa italiana del neocapitalismo*, p. 275; See also Elisabetta Mondello, *La nuova italiana. La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del Ventennio* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987).

³ Silvia Salvatici, 'Il rotocalco femminile: una presenza nuova negli anni del fascismo', in *Donne e giornalismo. Percorsi e presenze di una storia di genere*, ed. by Silvia Franchini and Simonetta Soldani (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), pp. 110–111. See also Franchini, 'Cultura nazionale e prodotti d'importazione: alle origini di un archetipo italiano di stampa femminile', in *ibid.*, pp. 75–109. For example, a periodical like *Lidel* (Milan: Lidel, 1919 – 1935) had an elegant appearance and published novels by eminent authors such as Massimo Bontempelli, Grazia Deledda and Luigi Pirandello, focusing on fashion and targeting educated upper class women. See Alessandra Zulli, *Le riviste femminili negli anni Venti: il caso di 'Lidel'*, <http://storiaefuturo.eu/le-riviste-di-moda-femminili-negli-anni-venti-il-caso-di-lidel/> [accessed 15 April 2016].

⁴ For example, one of the first women's *rotocalchi*, *Eva* (Milan: Vitaliano, later Rusconi, 1933 – 1969), had 11 pages in black and white and cost 60 *centesimi*, while a traditional periodical like *Lidel*, in 1930 had 101 pages and cost 10 *lire*. For further information, see *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*.

⁵ See Lilli, 'La stampa femminile', pp. 250–304, and in particular pp. 275–278.

⁶ Franchini, Soldani, 'Introduzione', in *Donne e giornalismo*, p. 17; see also pp. 75–109.

following section, in the Fascist era women were experiencing a profound and in some sense disconcerting redefinition of their role in society. On the one hand, the regime's rhetoric aimed to push women back into the house and to institutionalise traditional roles. On the other hand, women were facing a new, stimulating environment, involving an extension of their social, cultural, and working life. This was the result of the spread of a capitalist consumerism and the process of *massificazione*, and it also reflected certain inner contradictions of the Fascist regime, torn between the 'past' and the 'future'.⁷ These contradictions found expression in women's *rotocalchi*, which, like other periodicals and as analysed in the previous chapters, were granted a certain margin of freedom from censorship thanks to their entertaining and ostensible apolitical nature, making these publications particularly revealing in terms of both the media and the portrayal of women.⁸ In particular, the discrepancy between the ideal Fascist woman and the idea of womanhood in which Italian women reflected themselves was mirrored in women's *rotocalchi*. For this reason, these magazines offer a rich source material not only on the image of women proposed by the Fascist regime, but also on the new complex models and roles of femininity emerging from within the spreading modern forms of consumerism, which illustrated magazines both reflected and contributed to disseminate. While Fascist rhetoric adopted the Catholic and conservative ideal of *sposa e madre esemplare*,⁹ women's *rotocalchi* 'si propone[vano] di assecondare e incentivare i nuovi valori e interessi che [stavano] prendendo piede tra gli strati femminili della piccola e media borghesia urbana', thus representing a mirror to society and its changes.¹⁰ Women's *rotocalchi* therefore offer insights into the development of a new model of femininity, which appears to be more complex than the monolithic Fascist ideal if still anchored to traditional models. The coexistence of conflicting models of womanhood in women's *rotocalchi* demonstrates how, as De Berti and Mosconi put it, 'l'editoria popolare costituisce una specie di zona franca rispetto alle direttive del regime, almeno fino alle soglie

⁷ Helga Dittrich-Johansen, 'La "donna nuova" di Mussolini tra evasione e consumismo', *Studi storici*, 36.3 (1995), 811–843 (pp. 811–843). See also de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*.

⁸ See Elisabetta Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, pp. 13–20, and in particular p. 14: 'le maglie della censura erano, in effetti, meno strette per i periodici'. However, Helga Dittrich-Johansen in 'Dal privato al pubblico. Maternità e lavoro nelle riviste femminili dell'epoca fascista', *Studi storici*, 35.1 (1994) 207–243 (p. 223), footnote 28, reminds that 'l'irreggimentazione, l'asservimento e l'ossequio alle direttive del regime erano obbligatori anche per la stampa a carattere periodico, inclusa quella rivolta ad un pubblico esplicitamente femminile'.

⁹ After the publication of Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1975), the first comprehensive study on women under the Fascist regime, the expression 'sposa e madre esemplare' has become commonly used as a synonym for the fascist ideal woman.

¹⁰ Dittrich-Johansen, 'Dal privato al pubblico', p. 213.

della seconda guerra mondiale'.¹¹ In other words, women's magazines of the 1930s gave voice to aspirations diverging from the angel of the hearth proposed by the Fascist propaganda and engaged with the modern world.

In particular, one of the ways in which women's *rotocalchi* engaged with forms of modern roles for women was by echoing models coming from abroad, as in previous cases from both Europe and America, reflecting the popularity of Hollywood lifestyles and images of beauty.¹² As in the cases of both *Omnibus* and *L'Avventuroso* analysed in previous chapters, foreign periodicals, and particularly French and American, influenced the form and content of Italian women's *rotocalchi*, and thus also contributed to the spreading of modern models of femininity. Conversely, the presence in the same women's *rotocalchi* of traditional Italian values, often steeped in Catholic and Fascist rhetoric, shows how the Italian magazines reinterpreted and adapted – in other words, *Italianised*. – foreign models. The presence of a multidirectional dialogue between American and European culture, and within European countries, and of traditional ideas of gender roles, can be clearly traced in one of the most successful and dynamic *rotocalco* magazines for women, *Grazia*. *Grazia* gave voice to both modern and traditional aspirations, addressing itself to women from all social classes, and represents the last case study of this dissertation.

First published in October 1938 by Mondadori, *Grazia* quickly became one of the main players in a wide field of publishing dedicated to women, and shows the multifaceted aspects of Italian womanhood at the end of the 1930s. This chapter aims to fill a gap in the field of research on women's magazines and the popular press under Fascism. As already discussed in chapter 1, scholarly studies of the Italian periodical press in general are fragmentary and mainly focused on 'higher' culture journals, and the field seems to be even more incomplete concerning women's press.¹³ This is demonstrated by the fact that the first study specifically dedicated to the Italian women's popular press, *Naturale come sei* by Milly Buonanno, was only published in 1975. In her introduction, Buonanno highlights the lack of accredited studies on a topic that many

¹¹ Raffele De Berti, Elena Mosconi, 'Nuove forme editoriali per nuovi stili di vita', in *Libri, giornali e riviste a Milano. Storia delle innovazioni nell'editoria milanese dall'Ottocento ad oggi*, ed. by Fausto Colombo (Milan: Abitare Segesta, 1998), pp. 144–151 (p. 149).

¹² According to De Berti, women's *rotocalchi* of the 1930s 'più o meno esplicitamente, richiama[va]no il mondo della celluloid e la moda incarnata dalle dive sullo schermo'. De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta*, p. 61. The impact of Hollywood stars on 20th-century society's dominant values has been discussed by Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998). See also Gundle, 'Stars and Ideology', in *Mussolini's Dream Factory*, pp. 115–117.

¹³ See general bibliographical survey in chapter 1.

considered frivolous, ‘non abbastanza centrale da motivare un’attenzione assidua’.¹⁴ Moreover, the majority of studies of women in the Fascist era focus on their condition within the regime, that is to say women’s political involvement and role within the totalitarian state.¹⁵ The first study that specifically addressed women’s magazines in the Fascist era was Elisabetta Mondello’s *La nuova italiana: la donna nella stampa e nella cultura del Ventennio* – published in 1987 – which questions the omissions and narrow perspectives created by previous scholarship and investigates important periodicals such as the *Almanacco della donna* (Florence: Bemporad, 1920 – 1943). Mondello’s investigation aims to be a starting point for further research, suggesting a new interpretation for the role of women’s magazines as a revealing source for the complexity behind the monolithic image proposed by the regime. Nonetheless, few subsequent studies have focused on periodicals in general and on women’s magazines in particular, and these have addressed only superficially the new genre launched by *rotocalchi*. This chapter, therefore, aims to fill a key gap in the literature on women’s *rotocalchi* and in the understanding of their relevance for both the development of a modern mass press and the shaping of an idea and culture of modern Italian woman in the Fascist era.

The study of *Grazia* not only provides a new perspective on the women’s press – a crucial sector for the development of the Italian modern mass press – but it also demonstrates the complexity of the image of women circulated by these magazines, in spite of the monolithic ideal proposed by the Fascist ideologues, and in the face of the impact of the Fascist propaganda on the field. An analysis of *Grazia* is thus another revealing example of how the emerging mass press developed under the Fascist regime, and demonstrates how foreign and modern models coexisted with – and sometimes overcame – Fascist ideals.

¹⁴ Milly Buonanno, *Naturale come sei* (Rimini-Florence: Guaraldi, 1975), p. 17. The first general study on Italian women’s press appears to be Grazia Cesarini, Ghita Marchi, *La stampa femminile dal '700 ad oggi* (Rome: Noi Donne, 1952).

¹⁵ Key studies include Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare*; Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *La donna nera* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976); Maria Fraddosio, ‘Le donne e il fascismo’, *Storia Contemporanea*, 26.2 (1986), 95–135; *La corporazione delle donne. Ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista*, ed. by Marina Addis Saba (Florence: Vallecchi, 1988); de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*. Together with Mondello’s investigation, these works have become the main references in the field. See also Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth-century Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Other relevant studies include: Helga Dittrich-Johansen, ‘La “donna nuova” di Mussolini tra evasione e consumismo’; *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, particularly pp. 3 – 443; Stefania Bartoloni, *Il fascismo e le donne nella “Rassegna femminile italiana” 1925–1930* (Rome: Biblink, 2012); Elisa Turrini, ‘L’ “Almanacco della donna italiana”: uno sguardo al femminile nel ventennio fascista’, *Storia e futuro*, 31 (2013) <http://storiaefuturo.eu/lalmanacco-della-donna-italiana-uno-sguardo-al-femminile-nel-ventennio-fascista/> [accessed 15 April 2016].

The chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 1 introduces the development of women's *rotocalchi* in the 1930s and the model of femininity proposed by the Fascist regime. Section 2 is the core of the chapter and presents the case study: *Grazia* is analysed in detail, from the creation of the magazine (section 2.1) and its relationship with the Fascist regime (section 2.2), to the launch of the first issue on November 1938 (section 2.3). *Grazia*'s main features are analysed through an examination of its approach to its readers and its writing style. The focus is in particular on the analysis of the column 'Essere donna', written by a man (section 2.4), and two main other regular sections, 'Vivere in due' (section 2.5) and 'Grazia vi scrive' (section 2.6). These two columns have been chosen as epitomes of the characteristics of the magazine, as they represent respectively a feature unique to *Grazia*, and *Grazia*'s customisation of a kind of column common to many *rotocalchi*. Furthermore, they provide rich information for the study of women's *rotocalchi* in relation to the wider Italian society and the Fascist regime, revealing details of not only the women who read and contributed to *Grazia*; but also the influence of the Fascist regime on the magazine. As will be seen, 'Vivere in due' for example offers a strong illustration of the *sposa e madre esemplare*, whereas in 'Grazia vi scrive' a complex model of femininity clearly emerges, which combines elements of modernity with traditional values and Fascist precepts. In the following section, the general Fascist attitude towards women is introduced, in order to better understand the context of women's *rotocalchi*, and *Grazia* in particular, in the dissemination of different models of femininity in the 1930s.

1.2 Women and the Fascist regime: the *donna nuova*

Italian Fascism aspired to what Emilio Gentile defines as an 'anthropological revolution', which he means a regeneration of the Italian character and the creation of a new Italian race. In other words, the Fascist regime intended to 'create a new civilisation based on the principles and institutions of fascist totalitarianism'.¹⁶ This revolutionary project implied the creation of a 'new man' and his faithful and reliable companion, the 'new woman'. Victoria de Grazia describes Fascist women as 'prolific mates, dutiful mothers, and ardent patriots', conceived in contrast with the new Fascist men, who were educated to 'believe, obey, and fight'.¹⁷ Fascism, indeed, aimed at a rigid separation between the public and the private sphere, and so between men and

¹⁶ Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, p. 7.

¹⁷ de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 116.

women, an objective that found a formal expression with the launch of the demographic campaign in 1927, after which women were officially to be reproducers of the nation. However, women were not expected to be only mothers. As Annabella Gioia wrote, the ‘*donna nuova* doveva saper coniugare l’abnegazione materna, i valori della domesticità con l’attivismo sociale nelle forme e nei modi stabiliti dal regime; doveva inoltre apparire combattiva ma sottomessa all’autorità maschile’.¹⁸ Fascism created a hybrid woman, who was focused on motherhood and submissive to the male authority – fulfilling her traditional role – but, at the same time, expected to be an active agent in the totalitarian state – that is to say to have a modern role in the state, expressing patriotism and participating in the public sphere within Fascist organisations and events.

In spite of the widespread Fascist propaganda, the regime’s ideal woman was not the only model of womanhood to which Italian women were exposed. As described already in earlier chapters, new models of femininity created abroad became more and more popular particularly thanks to the success of Hollywood films, which deeply influenced young women, and to the spread of modern consumerism, despite the opposition of the regime to foreign trends.¹⁹ As mentioned with regard to *Omnibus*, until the approval of a law on the monopoly over the distribution of foreign films in 1938, Hollywood products were easily accessible to the masses, from large posters on the streets to popular fan magazines on the newsstands. Hollywood films, and particularly its stars, played an important role in suggesting new models of behaviour and beauty, providing alternative gender roles and disseminating an alternative fantasy and ideal of the modern woman, which the Fascist regime identified as the ‘crisis-woman’, exemplified by the figure of the American ‘flapper’ described in chapter 1. Embodied by the actress Clara Bow, the typical flapper was ‘shameless, selfish and honest’ and was looking for ‘partners who offered passion and eroticism in marriage’.²⁰ This model of woman, characterised by a slim body among other traits, was perceived as a dangerous ideal that could threaten the survival of the nation, as thinness, according to the Fascist ideologues, was a sign of sterility which would cause a decline

¹⁸ Annabella Gioia, *Donne senza qualità. Immagini femminili nell’Archivio storico dell’Istituto Luce* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010), p. 8.

¹⁹ On Italian film audience see Gundle, *Mussolini’s Dream Factory*, pp. 96–117.

²⁰ See Natasha V. Chang, *The Crisis Woman: Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2015). On stars, Andrew Willis, *Film Stars: Hollywood and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2004), p. 10. On Hollywood models of femininity see also Sarah Berry, *Screen Style and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

of the national birth rate – and consequently lead to the end of the nation.²¹ This view was clearly expressed by Mussolini in a 1932 speech aimed at doctors: ‘sono i pregiudizi della moda che finiscono per essere deleteri ai fini della forza. Ve ne cito uno: la moda del dimagrimento eccessivo. Questa indebolisce la razza ed ha delle ripercussioni anche d'ordine e di natura economica’.²²

The modern woman also threatened the traditional and patriarchal social order by subverting the established morality; she aimed at independence, had a job, and did not see maternity and marriage as her main ambition.

The ‘crisis-woman’ was created by Fascist propaganda as a negative model to oppose the allure of the modern woman, who ‘was fashionable, worldly, emancipated, and a challenge to traditional gender norms’.²³ In opposition to this deviant model, and as part of its radical anthropological project, the regime created its own model and proposed the ideal of the *donna nuova*. The new Fascist woman was curvaceous, highly feminine and fertile, her femininity glorified in her biological function and her education aimed at raising healthy children. The crucial importance of motherhood was reiterated by Mussolini in the 1932 speech:

sono quelle che io chiamo storture della civiltà contemporanea [...] che la maternità attenui la bellezza muliebre; è precisamente vero il contrario come ognuno di voi può constatare. [...] Voi sapete quale è la mia teoria: massimo di natalità, minimo di mortalità; ed i due aspetti del fenomeno sono interdipendenti. [...] È vero, inoltre, che le Nazioni invecchiano e che, ad un certo momento, la natura imporrà le sue leggi inesorabili. Le Nazioni invecchiate avranno il tracollo formidabile della loro popolazione.²⁴

The role of women as wives was echoed by and reflected in women’s *rotocalchi*, in which, as discussed below, motherhood coexisted with other lifestyle aspirations and modern attitudes, and represented only one side of a multi-layered image of womanhood.

The next section is dedicated to assessing the importance of *Grazia* as a representative example of the field of women’s *rotocalchi*. It sets out the story of its creation and development

²¹ Chang, *The Crisis Woman*, p. 5.

²² Mussolini, ‘Discorso ai medici’, *Opera omnia*, XXV, pp. 58–62 (p. 60).

²³ Chang, *The Crisis Woman*, pp. 5–9.

²⁴ Mussolini, ‘Discorso ai medici’, p. 60. On the *donna nuova* see Patrizia Ferrara, ‘La “donna nuova” del fascismo e lo sport’, in *Sport e fascismo*, ed. by Maria Canella and Sergio Giuntini (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), pp. 209–233; Gioia, *Donne senza qualità*; de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*. On the American model of beauty see ‘This is the Ideal Figure that Modern Women Want’, *Life*, 15 August 1938, p. 38.

as a modern *rotocalco*. Specifically, choices and decisions made by the editor and the publishing company are investigated, so as to understand how the project was initiated and how the production of the magazine was subsequently organised over its six-year existence. The study of the years 1938-1943, when Mondadori suspended the magazine's publication due to the war, allows further for a discussion of how the magazine reflects and illustrates the complex socio-cultural positioning of its female readers during the late years of the Fascist regime and the war.

2. *Grazia* between marketing, ideology and modernity

2.1 November 1938: the launch of *Grazia*

The first issue of *Grazia* appeared on newsstands on 10 November 1938. It stood out from other women's magazines already in publication such as *Annabella*, *Eva*, and *Gioia!* for its cost, its look and its length. *Grazia* cost 80 *centesimi* and contained 32 colour print pages, making it bigger and cheaper compared with other popular women's publication at the time, which usually contained around 10 pages in black and white for a similar price.²⁵ The cover – an illustration in colour – portrayed two women, one sitting on the arm of a recliner and the other standing beside her touching her shoulder, graphically expressing the aim of the magazine to be 'un'amica al vostro fianco', as stated by a red subtitle.

Although *Grazia* was a new publication, it was the formal continuation of another woman's periodical, *Sovrana*, first published in 1927.²⁶ *Sovrana* was a monthly magazine published on glossy paper by the Istituto Nazionale per la propaganda industriale e commerciale publishing company from February 1927 until November 1938, when Mondadori bought the periodical and transformed it into a popular magazine format. The very first, significant change that occurred when *Sovrana* became *Grazia*, was in the intended readership. *Sovrana* was aimed at the upper classes, as stated in the first issue in February 1927: 'Non frivolezze, non plagi, non frasi fatte, ma azioni, riconoscimenti, realtà: sarà la nostra *un'esposizione elegante* di argomenti

²⁵ See 'Eva', in *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*, pp. 128–130, 'Lei', *ibid.*, pp. 202–204; 'Gioia!', *ibid.* pp. 161–162.

²⁶ *Sovrana* (Milan: Istituto Nazionale per la propaganda industriale e commerciale, 1927 –), for example, which became *Grazia* in 1938, highlighted in its first issue 'la volontà di concretezza e il carattere scelto del suo contenuto, come del suo pubblico'.

letterari, artistici, mondani che più interesseranno *la categoria scelta dei nostri lettori*'.²⁷

Mondadori's intention was instead to reach as many readers as possible, as confirmed by the presentation of *Grazia* in the first issue, 10 November 1938: '*Sovrana*, da questo numero, diventa *Grazia*. La trasformazione è avvenuta perché la rivista si avvicini di più a tutte le lettrici, di tutti gli strati sociali'.²⁸ In Mondadori's idea, every woman would find space in *Grazia*, a change expressed by the title of the magazine which became friendlier: from a noble title, to a common name.

The process of the creation of *Grazia* has been retraced by Patrizia Landi in her 2009 essay, which is the only study specifically focused on *Grazia*.²⁹ According to the documents analysed by Landi, Arnaldo Mondadori had held the idea of creating a new women's magazine since 1935, and in 1937 had considered buying the rights to reproduce and translate a foreign magazine such the French *Marie-Claire* (Paris: Prouvost, 1937 –). Initially, the project also involved the publisher Valentino Bompiani, who was working on a similar project himself. Bompiani was planning a new women's weekly to be called *Essere bella*, aimed at middle class women – 'donna italiana di media condizione' –, and sold for 50 *centesimi*.³⁰ The layout planned for this new periodical intended to avoid large illustrations or photomontages, aiming instead for a neat and elegant organisation of columns and few, essential illustrations. However, Mondadori and Bompiani's differing views on the magazine's proposed style ended their collaboration, and Mondadori launched his new magazine, *Grazia*, following his own project of an Italian magazine shaped on the models of successful foreign periodicals.³¹ Although when it was finally launched *Grazia* did not replicate *Marie-Claire*, the two magazines share similar features and, more importantly, adopt a similar approach to their readership. In *Marie-Claire*'s launch issue, in

²⁷ Quoted in *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*, p. 361 (emphasis mine). In 1932 *Sovrana* claimed among its subscribers even the Italian queen, cf. *Sovrana*, November 1932. Landi describes *Sovrana* as a 'rivista rivolta alla donna ricca, cosmopolita, raffinata e persino spregiudicata ma insieme capace di gestire la casa in tutti i suoi aspetti, vero e proprio dizionario dell'eleganza e del *glamour*', Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia"', p. 248.

²⁸ *Grazia*, 10 November 1938, p. 3 (emphasis mine).

²⁹ Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia"', pp. 235–304.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 235–247. Landi's account of the end of the collaboration between Mondadori and Bompiani appears to be confusing, perhaps due to a lack of primary sources on the topic. She first states that 'Bompiani [...] sottolinea[va] sin dalle prime battute di non essere d'accordo sulla linea scelta da Mondadori di fare una rivista "esclusivamente italiana", privandosi così del materiale straniero'. However, a few lines below she claims that 'In sostanza Bompiani sembrava non apprezzare troppo quanto si discostava dalla tradizione del periodico femminile italiano, preoccupato che le novità presentate e più vicine ai modelli stranieri potessero deludere il pubblico nostrano', p. 243.

March 1937, the editorial stated: ‘Vous êtes, toutes, un peu des *Marie-Claire*, ce journal a été conçu pour vous’,³² highlighting how the woman – the reader – was the magazine’s main focus. As is analysed below, *Grazia* had the same purpose: to put the woman at the centre and provide her with useful tips and guidance, to entertain her, inform and reflect her concerns, but always with herself as its reference-point. The title of the two magazines, both common names, is also revealing of the periodicals’ intention to be accessible and create a connection with the reader. Between 1937 and 1944, when its publication was halted because of the war, *Marie-Claire*’s main points of focus were fashion, beauty, housekeeping, cooking, marriage, and motherhood, with the explicit aim to ‘Donner à la femme française, en un seul journal, chaque semaine, tout ce qui peut l’intéresser ou lui être utile’. The content and aim were not the only feature *Marie-Claire* and *Grazia* had in common. Looking at the covers, important similarities can be noted also at the level for format and design. Both magazines’ covers featured a close-up portrait of an elegant woman, with the title of the magazine at the top of the page. The covers looked neat and elegant, with the date and price on the bottom right side in both cases.³³

A similar layout can also be found in other French women’s magazines, such as *Confidences* (Paris: [n. publ.], 1938 – 1986), and *Votre Bonheur* (Paris: [n. publ.], 1938 – 1939), which also featured close-up portraits of women on their cover, although the examples here are of more domesticated and less glamorous women than *Marie-Claire* and *Grazia*.

As in other sectors explored in this dissertation, it is worth highlighting how these European women’s magazines of the second half of the 1930s not only influenced and shaped each other, but were influenced in turn by American women’s magazines.

Confidences, for example, was created on the model of the American confession magazine *True Story* (New York: True Renditions, 1919 –), whereas *Marie-Claire*, according to Hewitt, ‘presented [...] a format which was largely borrowed from American women’s magazine journalism [which suggested] an image of women which was always young and attractive, half-

³² Quoted in Alexie Geers, ‘From Marie-Claire Magazine’s Authoritative Pedagogy to the Hellocoton Blog Platform’s Knowledge Sharing: Between Gender Construction and Gender Appropriation’, in *Connecting Gender, Women and ICT in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, ed. by Valérie Schafer and Benjamin Thierry (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), pp. 61–73 (p. 61).

³³ The cover of *Grazia* changed in June 1939, when the illustrations in colour by Gino Boccasile were substituted with elegant photographs of women in colour (generally a close-up portrait).

way between the housewife and the liberated woman'.³⁴ Furthermore, both *Marie-Claire* and *Grazia* had diversified content, which included serialised fiction, recipes and entertainment, all typical features of the American press.

Looking at the covers of 1937 and 1938 American magazines such as *Vogue* (New York: Turnure, 1892–1909, then Condé Nast, 1909 –), or the *Ladies' Home Journal* (New York: Meredith Corp., 1883 –), the similarity with *Grazia* and *Marie-Claire* is striking.³⁵ However, covers were not the only elements these magazines had in common: they were all organised as a guide to everyday life for modern women, offering practical advice on marriage, child rearing, crafts, housekeeping, and, above all, beauty and fashion.

Other European magazines also shared the same structure and focus, and included articles on lifestyle, fashion, cookery, childcare, beauty and fashion. British magazines such as *Woman's Own* (London: IPC Magazines Ltd, 1932 –), and the British edition of *Good Housekeeping* (London: National Magazine Co, 1922 –), for example, were aimed at middle and educated working class women, and offer advice on housekeeping following the modern idea of a scientific approach to domestic life.³⁶ A more glamorous edge was instead offered by German women's magazines of the 1930s, such as *Die Dame* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1912–1943), and *Blatt der Hausfrau* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1886–1944; then *Brigitte*, Hamburg: Gruner + Jahr, 1949 –), which matched the modern, Hollywood-inspired model of womanhood, in spite of the Nazi regime's effort to disseminate a model of woman focused on child rearing. *Die Dame* and *Brigitte* offered to their readers 'flappers and creatures of luxury [...] who could hardly differ more from the hard-working, loveable, and reliable women we know as wives, mothers and colleagues'.³⁷

³⁴ Nicholas Hewitt, 'The Birth of the Glossy Magazines: The Case of *Paris-Match*', in *France and the Mass Media*, ed. by Brian Rigby and Nicholas Hewitt (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991), p. 112. On European and American women's magazines see also Kate Nelson Best, *The History of Fashion Journalism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

³⁵ On American women's periodicals see *Women's Periodicals in the United States. Consumer Magazines*, ed. by Kathleen L. Endre and Therese L. Lueck (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), particularly pp. 172–175 on the *Ladies' Home Journal*; Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792–1995* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998); and Nancy Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World. American Women's Magazines* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

³⁶ On British women's magazines see Jill Greenfield, Chris Reid, 'Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from *Woman's Own*', *Media History*, 4.2 (1998) 161–174; Fiona Hackney, '"Women are News": British Women's Magazines 1919–1939', in *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940*, ed. by Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 114–133; and Alice Wood, 'Modernism and the Middlebrow in British Magazines, 1916–1930', in *Middlebrow and Gender, 1980–1945*, ed. by Christoph Ehland and Cornelia Wächter (2016), DOI: 10.1163/9789004313378.

³⁷ *Der Zeitschriften-Verleger*, 21 April 1937, quoted in Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 325. On German women's magazines see Sylvia Lott-Almstadt, *Brigitte*

Overall, European women's magazines of the 1930s, as much as their American equivalent, offered to their readership a similar set of features, and were shaped as a guide to an efficient and stylish domestic life, in order to meet the modern woman's demands and desires.

Magazines such as *Marie-Claire* and *Grazia*, then, seemed to offered the glamour of fashion periodicals but at the affordable price of popular magazines, establishing a model of the woman's magazine that would be carried on after the war and indeed up to the present day. In other words, as already seen in chapters 2 and 3 in their different ways, with the cases of *L'Avventuroso* and *Omnibus*, modern women's *rotocalchi* reflected foreign models in both content and design, although they adapted these foreign models to Italian culture, a process of *Italianisation* as well as hybridisation to create something new.

After June 1939, *Grazia*'s cover photos were created by Patellani, but no other information was given on the identity of the artist. As with *Omnibus*, there is no detailed information on the collaborators of *Grazia*, whose articles are often unsigned, signed with a pseudonym or only with the initials of the author. However, from a systematic analysis of *Grazia* it is possible to trace some of the key regular writers or recurrent contributors. Among the regular contributors, Giorgio Scerbanenco and Wanda Bontà are two who without a doubt contributed to the magazine from the first issue of November 1938 to the last known issue of June 1943.³⁸ They both signed their regular columns using the pseudonyms Luciano and Clementina respectively, whereas their stories and novels were signed with their real names.³⁹ The fashion sections also had regular contributors whose identity is known, such as Brunetta (Bruna Mateldi), (Gino) Boccasile and Emma Calderini, whereas the artist Alberto Bianchi signed portraits of the readers' children. The graphologist Giovanni Vian, theatre critic Mario Sanvito, and Cesare Zavattini (who wrote a column addressed to mothers) are the last known identities of the regular contributors. Apart from authors of short stories or novels recurring in

1886–1986: *die ersten hundert Jahre. Chronik einer Frauenzeitschrift* (Hamburg: Gurner + Jahr, 1986); Nina Sylvester, 'Before Cosmopolitan', *Journalism Studies*, 8.4 (2007) 550–554; Mila Ganeva, *Women in Weimar Fashion* (New York: Camden House, 2008).

³⁸ Mondadori stopped the publication of *Grazia* because of the war, resuming it in 1945 with an *Almanacco*. The last issue seems to be n. 243, 24 June 1943, although there are no official sources confirming it. See *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*, pp. 361–365.

³⁹ For example, Wanda Bontà's novel *L'ombra sul fiore* appeared in episodes from issue 87, 11 July 1927, to 121, 20 January 1941. It is interesting to notice how, while Clementina's identity was revealed (see Wanda Bontà, 'Come la pensa Clementina', *Grazia*, 4 March 1943, p. 9), Luciano's remained hidden. It is possible to trace his identity back to Scerbanenco thanks to the publication of 'Il romanzo di Luciano' in *Grazia* ('Infedeli innamorati', from 13 August 1942).

the magazine – such as Elisa Trapani, Ita Baraldi, Bruno Corra, Adriano Baracco, Annamaria Tedeschi, Claudio Del Mare, Lydia Capece, Carola Prosperi, Raul Radice, and Pina Ballario – all the other regular contributors only signed with their first name or initials: Paola, Laura, and Ley (fashion illustrators), Pupa (cooking column), Vitruvio (interior design), Elisa (etiquette), Vida (general advice), and O. N. (book reviews). Other contributors appeared regularly from 1940, like Piera Ruffini, Giupa, Puntaspilli, and Luigi – the latter with a column on men’s thoughts. The list of occasional contributors would be very long, but it is worth noticing how many articles were simply signed by a female name, like Pamela, Barbara, Donata or Claudia, as if highlighting how *Grazia* was a place where any woman could share thoughts and advice and find a friendly voice. Moreover, in 1942 another pseudonym appeared, ‘la massaia rurale’, which can be seen both as an example of a clear Fascist influence on *Grazia* and an attempt made by Mondadori to reach rural women and thus expand the readership.⁴⁰ Rural women were indeed part of the readership excluded by traditional women’s magazines, which, as already mentioned, targeted mainly upper classes or at best the urban middle classes. The attempt to reach rural women with specific articles written for them and – allegedly – by one of them, demonstrates Mondadori’s aim of making *Grazia* a magazine of interest to any woman from any social class. In other words, Mondadori made *Grazia* a magazine ‘adatta a un pubblico femminile di massa’.⁴¹

Since the first issue of November 1938, the magazine remained consistent, with no striking changes in the structure and general content. The minor changes that marked its development concerned instead the day of distribution, the price, and the style of the contents page. Initially, *Grazia* was available in the newsstands on Saturday, changing the day to Thursday in 1939. The price increased from 80 *centesimi* in 1938 to 2 *lire* in 1942. The number of pages also changed, from 32 in 1938 up to 52 in June 1941, dropping again from 21 August 1941 ‘in ottemperanza al

⁴⁰ See for example La massaia rurale, ‘Amare la campagna: la vendemmia’, *Grazia*, 3 September 1942. See also Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massaie Rurali* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴¹ *Bibliografia dei periodici femminili*, p. 364. According to Annamaria Ruggiero, in ‘L’immagine della donna italiana nelle riviste femminili durante gli anni del fascismo’, http://www.officinadellastoria.info/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=350:limmagine-della-donna-italiana-nelle-riviste-femminili-durante-gli-anni-del-fascismo&catid=68:fotografia-e-storia [accessed 20 April 2016], ‘la principale lettrice delle riviste era la donna borghese, che era la protagonista assoluta della moda’. On the contrary, by also targeting rural women, *Grazia* was not specifically aimed at any social class but rather to potentially all Italian women. Nonetheless, high illiteracy rate among rural women cannot be ignored, as it lowered the percentage of readers from rural class. See Willson, *Peasant Women*, p. 109 and pp. 113–114.

Decreto Ministeriale per la disciplina del consumo della carta'.⁴² The trend in the number of pages and price can be examined by taking the first issue of each year as a representative sample:

- November 1938: 31 pages, 80 *centesimi*
- January 1939: 36 pages, 80 *centesimi*
- January 1940: 28 pages, 1 *lira*
- January 1941: 36 pages, 1,20 *lire*
- January 1942: 44 pages, 2 *lire*
- January 1943: 36 pages, 2 *lire*

The change in price, number of pages and layout never affected the frequency of publication, which remained weekly throughout the six years, in spite of the war and the difficulties it caused to the press industry in paper supplies, distribution and sales.

Although *Grazia* was conceived and produced as an innovative magazine and distanced itself from traditional magazines in price, layout, content, and intended readership, in the 1930s it was not the only women's *rotocalco* available to middle class women. In 1933, *Eva* and *Lei* were launched by Vitagliano and Rizzoli respectively, whereas in 1937 the publisher Società Anonima Milanese distributed *Gioia!*. These weeklies had many similarities, such as serialised romance novels and short stories, fashion illustrations, and advice columns. Even a graphologist column was a common feature of *Grazia*, *Lei*, and *Gioia!*, although the latter asked to be paid for the psychological profile of the readers. However, the most significant innovation introduced by the new formula of the *rotocalco femminile* was the advice column that was, and it was shared by all these publications with a view to create intimacy and loyalty between the readers and the magazine.⁴³ A column focused on a man's point of view was also a feature shared by these *rotocalchi*. However, whereas in *Lei* and *Gioia!* the column was structured as an advice column, with a male writer answering the readers' letters, in *Grazia* it read like a journal through which the readers could learn more about the thoughts of men. The diary was first published on 6 August 1942 with the title 'Diario di un uomo che possono leggere anche le donne', simply

⁴² *Grazia*, 21 August 1921, p. 4.

⁴³ *Marie-Claire* also shared this feature and attitude: 'The responses [to the readers' letter] were signed by the first name of the columnist. This personal touch introduced feelings of connections. *Marie-Claire* was able to simultaneously embody the character of the columnist addressing readers and the readers themselves', Geers, 'From Marie-Claire Magazine's Authoritative Pedagogy', p. 67.

signed by Luigi, whose real identity it has not been possible to retrace. *Eva* and *Lei* published also news and features on the royal family as well as Mussolini's family members, while *Gioia!* had a catholic influence and almost no interest in fashion. *Grazia* distinguished itself for the absence of such news features, and its fashion columns were more practical than *Eva*'s and *Lei*'s and they represented more of a central aspect for the magazine.

Another element that differentiated *Grazia* from other women's weeklies was its friendly and informal language, and the structure of the articles; it was not only the message delivered or the layout that made this periodical original, but also its informal approach to the readership. The magazine was organised so that it could be read as a conversation between two friends: *Grazia* and the reader. The following analysis of *Grazia*'s interaction with the readership, its writing style, and the representation of women as both flawless mothers and wives, and women with a modern attitude, as they emerge from key regular columns, demonstrates this, and reveals the multifaceted model of femininity proposed by the magazine.

2.2 *Grazia* and the Fascist regime

It has been argued that *Grazia* was a truly innovative product whose content was not influenced by Fascist ideology. According to this view, *Grazia* was a magazine that distanced itself from the Fascist regime, suggesting models closer to a modern woman than to the *sposa e madre esemplare*.⁴⁴ On the contrary, another study suggests that *Grazia* was aligned with Fascist precepts, publishing columns that proposed a traditional model of femininity to the detriment of modern models.⁴⁵ In this chapter, the analysis of *Grazia* demonstrates that this publication was indeed steeped in Fascist rhetoric, and if any kind of implicit resistance took place, it was the result of editorial strategies aimed at selling as many copies as possible.⁴⁶

Grazia was a commercial product and, as such, it responded to the law of markets. At the same time, as Salvatici put it, 'la stampa femminile di costume [...] non solo riflette[va] ma

⁴⁴ See Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia"', pp. 235–304.

⁴⁵ Salvatici, 'Il rotocalco femminile', pp. 124–125.

⁴⁶ In 'La "donna nuova" di Mussolini', Dittrich-Johansen defines the new formula of the *rotocalco* as the 'risultato di un'operazione commerciale' (p. 813). See in particular p. 820: 'le pagine degli innocui rotocalchi offrono un curioso miscuglio di concessioni all'ideologia dominante e di valorizzazione di altre immagini di donna [...] Il tipo ideale di lettrice resta ancora quello di una donna concepita in totale funzione dell'uomo e la cui esistenza si esaurisce nell'universo familiare, ma è al tempo stesso anche quello di una lavoratrice extradomestica che [...] sperimenta nuove occasioni di socializzazione'.

sollecita[va] e alimenta[va] i mutamenti in atto'.⁴⁷ Therefore, although Landi affirms articles dedicated to women in employment are a proof of *Grazia*'s freedom from any ideological influence, these articles are more a reflection of the changes happening in Italian society and of commercial strategies aimed at selling as many copies as possible rather than a sign of any ideological belief.⁴⁸ This thesis finds further confirmation in the presence of such articles in other popular *rotocalchi* such as *Eva*, *Lei*, and *Gioia!*, which engaged in discussions with their readers on the question, suggesting that it was an unavoidable topic for magazines targeting mainly middle class women. Furthermore, considering the number of women in employment in the 1930s, the presence of articles that pay attention to a large section of readership can rather be explained in terms of marketing: a magazine that aimed to reach as many readers as possible could not avoid taking into account women in employment.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, the Fascist ideal model of woman emerges throughout the magazine with articles on the household, motherhood, and traditional women's crafts such as knitting and sewing. For this reason, it also seems inaccurate to describe *Grazia* as a magazine that had nothing to do with the Fascist regime. This is especially true if we look at articles dedicated to the household. An entire section of the magazine was dedicated to marriage, with the image of a wife emerging as submissive and focused on her husband and children, perfectly matching the Fascist ideal of the *angelo del focolare*.⁵⁰ However, at the same time the magazine privileged frivolous topics such as fashion, beauty, and festive events, so that it would be equally inaccurate to define *Grazia* as a *fascist* magazine. In other words, the image of women suggested by *Grazia* was consistent with the Fascist ideal but not limited to it. The reason for the editorial choice to propose also a modern model of woman seems to lie rather in the publishing market, confirming the complex process in the production of popular periodicals during the Fascist era which cannot be merely reduced to a political or ideological aspect. As the previous chapters have shown, this complexity was the result of a general change that occurred in the popular press in this period. The spread of the *rotocalchi* provided conflicting images of women, including the official and traditional model of

⁴⁷ Salvatici, 'Il rotocalco femminile', p. 125.

⁴⁸ Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia"', p. 261.

⁴⁹ According to the 1931 and 1936 census, 2.4 million and 2.8 million women were recorded as employed in non-agricultural sectors respectively, while 1.5 million and 2.5 were recorded as economically active in agriculture in 1931 and 1936 respectively. See Willson, *Women in Twentieth Century Italy*, p. 75; and de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 166 and ff.

⁵⁰ The *angelo del focolare* is a model of femininity that glorifies the role of women as mothers and wives. See section 1 above.

mother and wife *and*, at the same time, promoting new habits that reflected and spread modern feminine models, often coming from the United States. Women were attracted by the new femininity suggested by Hollywood stars, a fascination that the popular press, in Italy as much as in other European countries, was incentivised to offer to its readership in order to sell more copies of their publications.⁵¹ Italian women's periodicals represented a point of intersection between these different models, and *Grazia* confirms the complexity of this sector and the media, which reflected both the inner contradictions of the Fascist policies towards women, which were pushing them back in the house and promoting at the same time their political involvement, and the conflict between traditional values and the new, modern models of femininity.

2.3 *Grazia's* first issue: 10 November 1938

The distinctive features and complexity of *Grazia* as a case study are already apparent from its very first issue. Similarly to *Marie-Claire*, *Grazia* presented itself as a friend every woman could talk to:

Questa rivista – che continua con nuovi propositi la tradizione di un'altra rivista alla quale si sostituisce – deve essere per voi, veramente “un'amica al vostro fianco”. Voi non siete una nostra lettrice: siete una nostra amica. Noi ci rivolgiamo a voi per esservi amicalmente d'aiuto nelle contingenze più varie della vita: dal consiglio per un pranzo in quattro con trenta lire, alla risposta ad una mamma che aspetta il primo bimbo; dalla favola di Biancaneve per il Vostro bambino, al modo come si rimoderna un abito. E voi rivolgetevi a noi.⁵²

Consistent with this statement, *Grazia* was shaped like a guide to a happier life. Home economics, fitness, personal advice, and beauty tips were the core ingredients for a magazine dedicated to the new Italian woman of the 1930s, struggling with the economic crisis and living in autarchy.

The table of contents, published on p. 4, presented *Grazia's* columns divided into sections, or main topics. In the first issue, there were eight sections in total, and the first to be listed was a section on happiness, ‘Per essere felice’, which included columns such as ‘Vivere in

⁵¹ Even in Nazi Germany the Hollywood model of beauty resisted the regime's attacks and remained a constant feature of German popular women's magazines. See Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 521–524.

⁵² *Grazia*, 10 November 1938, p. 4.

due', about married life; 'Essere donna', about womanhood; and 'Grazia vi scrive', one of the most typical and successful columns, in which *Grazia* replied to readers' letters.

The second section, 'Per essere eleganti', was dedicated to fashion and consisted of three articles explaining how to make hats, how to modernise an old dress, and how to make a pair of gloves respectively. Each article included illustrations and pictures, sewing models, and advice on style, providing practical guidance and tips on homemade fashion.

The third, 'Per vivere bene in casa', aimed to give advice on housekeeping and included two articles. The first suggested a dinner plan to make supper for four people without spending too much, while the second explained how to create your own lampshades for home décor. Both articles addressed home economics, and specifically how to impress guests with little money.

The fourth section, 'Per essere bella', was one of the smallest sections of this issue with only one article about beauty, which suggested techniques for staying beautiful in spite of having a cold.

The fifth section was about children, and included a regular weekly column written by Zavattini, 'I vostri bambini vi guardano', in which mothers would find 'un pensiero, un'immagine, riguardante i rapporti tra voi e i bambini'. The readers were invited to be part of the creation of the section, as the page would be edited 'con il vostro aiuto, lettrici, poiché da voi ci aspettiamo domande, suggerimenti, notizie o quant'altro possa contribuire a illuminarci reciprocamente su questo problema'.⁵³

Consistent with the attention paid by the Fascist regime to sports, the sixth section was devoted to fitness. In 'Per essere sana', one article explained how, in order to be beautiful, women needed to exercise daily, as make-up was not enough. A series of pictures showed different trainings with detailed explanation in captions, encouraging women to exercise at home.⁵⁴

Finally, the first issue ended with a section dedicated to entertainment, 'Per essere lieta', which published the first chapter of a novel by Raul Radice, 'Tre sorelle'.

Towards the end of the issue, two pages were dedicated to current events but did not appear in the table of contents. The section, titled 'In questi sette giorni', aimed to inform readers

⁵³ Ibid., p. 20

⁵⁴ As already mentioned in chapter 3, a similar feature can be found in *Vu. Marie-Claire* also featured articles explaining simple gymnastic exercise to do at home, with pictures and illustrations. See *Marie-Claire*, 31 December 1937, p. 39.

about the latest cultural events, film screenings, book releases, and theatre, in order to help them live their lives to the full: '[per] non rinchiudersi solo nel nostro angusto ed egoistico mondo, nei nostri minimi interessi, ecco un altro importante segreto per vivere interamente la propria vita'.⁵⁵

Looking at the content of the first issue of *Grazia*, it is evident that the magazine aimed to cover a wide range of topics and intended to help women to cope better with everyday life, consistent with the pattern of women's popular periodicals established in Europe and the United States in the 1930s. It is also possible to see how *Grazia* distanced itself from *Sovrana*, targeting middle and lower middle class readers, as demonstrated by articles on how to make the most out of a small income. Such techniques, used by the magazine to appeal to women from different backgrounds, is investigated further in the following section, which analyses the informal language of the magazine, and takes the columns 'Per essere donna' and 'Vivere in due' as examples of the magazine's methods to reach out to the everyday woman.

2.4 The everyday woman

From the very first pages of the first issue, it is clear that *Grazia* aimed to reach as many women as possible. Next to the magazine's statement of its aims, a short piece simply signed 'Luciano' seemed to be directed to the reader herself. It was the first article of the regular column 'Essere donna', and read as an informal letter written to a friend. Two elements make this piece particularly interesting. First, it described a woman every reader could identify herself with, as it referred to leisure activities, fashion, lifestyle, and jobs to which any young lady, whether a typist, maid, aristocrat or middle-class woman, could relate. The direct and informal language used by Luciano suggested an intimate knowledge of what being a woman meant, and appealed to the readers with statements exalting womanhood. Second, the piece drew on the regime's rhetoric, providing evidence of the influence of the Fascist ideology in *Grazia*, as demonstrated by two references addressed to the role of women which matched the Fascist ideal. First, Luciano referred to women's behaviour during the war: 'Mi hai seguito [...] fino all'orlo della trincea: volevi morire per la patria, e per me. Io ti ho detto "Abbi fede". E tu sei tornata indietro, forte e obbediente, col tuo bambino in collo'. The second referred to a woman's general place in society: 'Vorrei domandarti se ti è più dolce essere moglie o essere madre: tu mi risponderesti

⁵⁵ *Grazia*, 10 November 1938, pp. 18–19.

che ti è dolce esser donna, che nel tuo dovere sta il tuo amore, e che misuri l'immenso compito affidato dalla patria al tuo cuore e alla tua volontà'.⁵⁶ In both cases, being a woman meant being an obedient wife and devoted mother, devoted to the 'patria'.

Luciano, whose real identity as we have seen was not specified in the magazine but can be traced back to Giorgio Scerbanenco, expressed in his articles clear elements of Fascist morality and exalted traditional values, giving implicit direction on how a woman should behave in order to be properly feminine and appreciated. From both statements there also emerges clearly the virility within Fascist rhetoric: the man is the one who takes action, while the woman must obey and take care of children. The reference to a woman's duty towards the fatherland is another clear and strong indicator of Fascist language. These details confirm that the magazine cannot be considered as alienated from its contemporary society and the Fascist regime, since it embraced from the start the traditional roles for women proposed by the predominant culture. The presence of articles on sport, and illustrated instructions on postural training, confirms that *Grazia* was a product of its time, conditioned by both the market as well as the dominant Fascist culture.

Nonetheless, elements of a modern and in some respects non-Fascist, even anti-Fascist approach to women's life also appear in 'Essere donna'. In January 1940, for example, by writing about the ending of the festive season, Luciano refers to his imaginary reader as a woman in employment: 'Sei pronta ad esser felice anche per la minima cosa; [...] ad accogliere con un sorriso sincero, le giornate di lavoro, il tram che ti porta in ufficio [...]'.⁵⁷ Again, in the next issue, he writes:

Sei certamente una piccola impiegata perduta tra i cento impiegati di un grande ufficio. Qualche domenica vai a sciare [...] Sabato sera, nel rifugio, avrete fatto un po' di festa, avrete suonato, avrete tentato di ballare nei pochi centimetri quadrati liberi [...] Poi ecco il lunedì [...] Aria burrascosa in ufficio [...] Ti vedo alle due, in tram [...] indossi il vecchio abito da lavoro [...] che ora si mostra per quello che veramente è, una povera cosa di poco prezzo. Ti vedo pensare che una lunga settimana di giornate simili ti attende; una settimana senza cinema, perché bisogna fare economia, senza divertimenti.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Luciano, 'Essere Donna', *Grazia*., p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Grazia*, 4 January 1940, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Grazia*, 11 January 1940, p. 7.

The woman emerging from Luciano's piece is a young unmarried employee who enjoys modern leisure time activities such as skiing, dancing, and going to the cinema; a woman who cares about fashion ('quel paloncino rossiccio che faceva un po' di figura quand'era nuovo, e che ora si mostra per quello che veramente è'),⁵⁹ and has to give up on entertaining activities to save money. Having to economise on clothing or leisure time activities was a reality affecting many middle class women, particularly after the start of the war, when a woman's salary became an important, if not the only, source of income for a family. This is an aspect of Italian women's life that Luciano reflects on in 'Essere donna' on 30 January 1941:

Questa ragazza non era certamente una donna di servizio [...] era forse una che non aveva mai pensato di fare la donna di servizio [ma] si è trovata costretta a farla, e fa il suo dovere. [...] Veste male, non ha un soldo di cipria sul volto [...] ha una scrittura elegante, morbida, senza incertezze. Molte signore che io conosco hanno assai meno confidenza con la penna.⁶⁰

Either for the need to financially support the family, or for the lack of skilled jobs, the article portrays a woman who has had to take on a humble job, in spite of having an education and, possibly, upper-middle class origins.

In 'Essere donna', Luciano mirrored Italian society of the time, echoing Fascist rhetoric but also acknowledging various modern roles of women, who often had to contribute to the family income, liked modern leisure activities, and cared about their looks.

As mentioned earlier, the informal writing style of the articles, written as they were directed specifically to the person who was reading them, is another of the principal features that made *Grazia* different from other magazines and make it such an interesting case study. Informal language had the effect of making it possible for every woman, from whichever social class, to feel connected with the magazine. Luciano's style is a classic example of this informality:

Quello che hai letto qualche volta nelle novelle, è capitato proprio a te. [...] Il tuo incontro col romanzo non sarebbe mai avvenuto. Non puoi e non devi accettare appuntamenti dal primo sconosciuto che ti

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Grazia*, 30 January 1941, p. 6.

telefona. Secoli di geloso riserbo femminile pesano sulle tue spalle e ti rendono fiera come sei. [...] E' un'altra classe la tua, dove non si ascoltano mai le voci ignote, anche se si desidera tanto ascoltarle'.⁶¹

Luciano addressed the woman using the informal 'tu' and talked to her as if he knew her intimately: he hints to the woman's romantic view of love encouraged by the novels she read, and his response delineates a disillusioned woman who he urges to react with pride and discretion, bringing in the myth of *romanità*. It is also worth highlighting Luciano's mention of romantic novels, which suggests the popularity of genre among women in those years.⁶²

Luciano's column embodies the intimacy between *Grazia* and its readers, although it clearly delivered messages aligned with Fascist rhetoric all along, as this piece published in 1942 demonstrates:

care lettrici [...] Mariuccia mi dà del tu, e questo va molto bene, mi saluta 'ciao Luciano' e anche questo va bene perché non mi piacciono i formalismi, ma mi scrive cose che vanno malissimo. [...] io dirò invece a Mariuccia che vi sono moltissime altre donne che hanno provato le sue stesse delusioni, e anche maggiori, eppure continuano a credere nella vita. [...] Guarda, Mariuccia, come le madri credono nei loro figli, come sono certe del loro luminoso avvenire, del loro felice destino, anche quando tutto sembra contrario.⁶³

Comforting a woman who wrote him a letter crying her unhappiness, Luciano takes the figure of mothers as an example of strength and resilience, and talks to the readers as if they were having a conversation, sharing intimate thoughts and fears. 'Essere donna' illustrates *Grazia*'s nature of a friendly voice which aims to help women live a happier life, and guides and supports them in difficult times. Another clear example of this is the column 'Vivere in due', signed by 'Clementina', which is analysed in the following section.

⁶¹ *Grazia*, 19 December 1939, p. 5.

⁶² On popular novels and women see Antonia Arslan, *Dame, droga e galline: romanzo popolare e romanzo di consumo fra '800 e '900* (Padua: Cleup, 1977); and Luigi Del Grosso Destreri, 'La galassia rosa: genesi e diramazioni', in *Una galassia rosa. Ricerche sulla letteratura femminile di consumo*, ed. by Luigi Del Grosso Destreri, Alberto Brodesco, Silvia Giovanetti, Sara Zanatta (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), pp. 9–36.

⁶³ *Grazia*, 1 January 1942, p. 14.

2.5 The good wife: 'Vivere in due'

Signed by Clementina, pseudonym of Wanda Bontà, the column 'Vivere in due' is among the most original features that distinguished *Grazia* from other women's *rotocalchi*. Whereas, as already discussed, many columns were common among all women's *rotocalchi* of the time, 'Vivere in due' was a feature which only appeared in *Grazia*. It is also one of the columns that more than any other reads like an intimate chat with a friend, as it is structured both as a wife's journal and a woman-to-woman conversation. In 'Vivere in due', Clementina describes ordinary moments of her married life with Paolo, their everyday problems and joys. In the first issue, Clementina introduced her little quarrels with Paolo, using an informal writing style: 'E' naturale quindi, che si cerchi di stare un po' più comodi, ognuno a modo suo; lui pretende di avere un pettine pulito ed io una salvietta senza peli di barba'.⁶⁴ From the start, Clementina shortens the distance with the readers by sharing a private moment of her life with Paolo, a little argument about annoying habits of the other half with which every couple could relate to. With honest and colloquial language, Clementina not only shares details of her married life, everyday problems, and personal achievements, but drawing on her experience she also gives advice to the reader on how to find happiness in a marriage. Overall, the column delivered the subtle message that the role of a woman is that of a good wife and mother, centred on the well-being of her husband and children.

'Vivere in due' was published from 10 November 1938 as a regular column, and it was consistently present until the last known issue before the interruption of publication because of the war (n. 243, 23 June 1943) – with the sole exception of 16 June 1943, when the column did not appear. Between 1938 and 1943, very few changes occurred to the column, and these did not affect the message delivered nor the focus, which continued on the theme of how to be a good wife.

The articles on Clementina and Paolo's family life always followed the same pattern. They began with a problem Clementina did not know how to deal with, followed by details on the development of the problem and its impact on Clementina and her husband's relationship, and finally ended with a positive outcome that showed how a wife's effort and sacrifice could bring happiness to the whole family.

⁶⁴ Clementina, 'Vivere in due', *Grazia*, 10 November 1938, p. 9.

On 6 November 1942, the column began to appear with the new title 'La pagina di Clementina', marking a change in format and reflecting the introduction of articles in which, leaving out her own private life, Clementina gave detailed accounts of conversations with a friend. In these articles, by giving advice to her friend, Clementina commented on different situations that might affect a woman's life, such as her love-life or problems in the workplace. These typically started with a call or a meeting with a friend who confided to Clementina her distress, and ended with Clementina analysing the situation and providing a solution applicable to any woman experiencing a similar problem. With the exception of the issue published on 4 March 1943, in which two letters written by a wife and a husband respectively substituted Clementina's article, 'Vivere in due' remained a constant throughout the Fascist years of *Grazia*.

Undoubtedly, the woman evoked in 'Vivere in due' conformed in many respects to the Fascist ideal of a compassionate *angelo del focolare*, focused on her husband's needs; but, more importantly, it connected with readers expressing the everyday Italian woman's intimate anxieties. An example of this is Clementina's worries regarding the war in her 1940 account of Christmas:

Io non so se il vostro Natale ha festeggiato alla sua mensa l'improvviso arrivo di un amato grigioverde, o ne ha sottolineato con tragico silenzio il posto vuoto. Io so però che ero con voi tutte nella chiesa [...] Il mio Natale, forse, è stato un po' come tutti i vostri riuniti. Mio marito era vicino a me, ma entrambi pensavamo ai lontani, specialmente al marito di mia cognata Dora.⁶⁵

Earlier that year, in the 87th issue, 4 July, less than a month after Italy declared war on France on 10 June, Clementina wrote her first piece that mentioned the war, in which she adopted a patriotic tone that gave women implicit advice on how to behave in such tragic circumstances. Confessing her struggle to deal with Paolo's new attitude of aggressive command and his excessive precision in implementing the blackout regulations, Clementina took the chance to tell Italian women to be supporting wives and citizens. After complaining about Paolo's strictness, during an air raid she had to take control of the situation, and realised her husband was right to follow the rules set by the Fascist government. She expressed patriotism in praising the Italian air

⁶⁵ *Grazia*, 26 December 1940, p. 28. In this piece Clementina speaks openly about the painful absence of husbands, fathers and brothers who are fighting the war ('grigioverde' refers to the colour of the Italian army uniform).

force ('l'allarme viene dato per semplice precauzione e una cintura validissima di aviatori italiani sta alla nostra difesa') and her role as the wife of a soldier and the mother to his children ('È come s'egli fosse diventato un gigante e un arcangelo. Ma anch'io sento sulla mia fronte il riverbero della sua luce: perché custodirò i suoi figli, i figli di un soldato').⁶⁶ She emerged from this piece as a strong wife who knew how to behave and assist her husband in support of the nation and the war cause: 'in tempo di guerra il meno che possiamo fare noi donne è di rinunciare alle crisi di nervi'.⁶⁷

A piece published on 11 July, with the significant title 'L'ora della patria', provides us with further details on what Italian wives were experiencing and *Grazia's* attitude towards the regime. Here Clementina describes the day Paolo received his conscription letter calling him to arms. On that day, in the morning, Clementina's family's new car had been confiscated by the army, and both Paolo and Clementina felt affected by the war for the first time. In spite of not having ever talked about Paolo's duties as a soldier, at the moment when Paolo told his wife he would be leaving in five days, Clementina was unsurprised and did not cry; instead, she pragmatically organised for her and their three children to move to the countryside, acting as if she already knew Paolo would have to leave. This piece revealed Clementina's unspoken anxiety, but also sent an encouraging message to all the Italian wives who had to say goodbye to their husbands: 'è così che bisogna lasciarsi. Con una parola d'amore che suoni piena di promesse come un'alba nuziale. Torniamo ad essere le fidanzate dei nostri sposi; ma con *l'orgogliosa fierezza delle donne di Roma*'.⁶⁸ Using Fascist rhetoric and evoking the myth of Rome, Clementina suggested to her readers that they should be proud of their nation and behave according to Fascist precepts, where affectation and whining were not tolerated. Women required this strength particularly in wartime, when wives had to take care of the family and manage finances on their own, performing many of the husband's traditional roles in addition to their own. Clementina personified this model of 'domestic soldier':

Io non sono una donna d'affari, ho sempre lasciato fare a Paolo [...] ma ora provo un gran bisogno di agire, di diventare una donna forte e saggia la quale sappia affrontare le responsabilità di un'ora di Guerra, di

⁶⁶ *Grazia*, 4 July 1940, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ 'L'ora della patria', *Grazia*, 11 July 1940, p. 28 (emphasis mine).

un'ora nella quale anche le piccolo mogli nate soltanto per amare debbano diventare energiche mogli di soldati.⁶⁹

This was not the only self-evident example of the Fascist 'new woman' provided by 'Vivere in due'. In many articles Clementina also addressed the Fascist model of beauty, whose femininity was expressed by her 'curvy' and healthy appearance, in opposition to the America model of beauty identified with the skinny woman, and whose strength could be found in her practical approach to life, focused on pleasing her husband and providing new children for the fatherland.⁷⁰

Remarkably, 'Vivere in due' was exceptional in *Grazia* as the only column that regularly mentioned the war and its difficulties, reflecting real time events, feelings and fears of Italian women. Whereas in its general content *Grazia* remained mainly focused on fashion, literature and general advice even after June 1940 – that is to say, it remained a commercial product for entertainment – Clementina's diary mirrored the hard times that Italian families were living through.

Nonetheless, after a few articles describing Paolo's difficulty in returning to normal life after fighting in Greece, 'Vivere in due' changed its tone from 5 June 1941. Clementina's narration resumed a cheerful and light-hearted tone, describing once again everyday episodes and her petty quarrels with Paolo. The column also started to publish general advice on how to find a husband and maintain a happy married life, as though the war were only a memory. This new attitude, introduced in June 1941, continued through 1942 and into 1943, when the magazine stopped publication. During its last year, Clementina's page became more of a conversation with her readers than a chronicle of her married life. From January to April 1943, the majority of the articles were conversations with women, friends or female acquaintances, with whom Clementina discussed various subjects, from coping with the cruel wife of a supervisor to surviving widowhood. For example, on 4 February, Clementina recalled a

⁶⁹ 'Decisioni per l'anno nuovo', *Grazia*, 2 January 1941, p. 28.

⁷⁰ Clementina often mentioned the Italian model of beauty. In 'L'amore e la linea', *Grazia*, 27 June 1940, p.28, for example, Clementina affirms that being 'curvy' shows good health and it is appreciated by men: 'Sono lietissima [...] di aver perso quell'aria piuttosto gracilina che avevo a vent'anni'; Giuliana – Clementina's eldest daughter – also praises her mother's curvy appearance: 'sei meravigliosa! [...] la zia [...] è come una bambina [...] ha le braccia sottili come le mie. Invece tu, mamma, sei morbida e imbottita come una poltrona e forte come un soldato'. See section 1.2 on the new woman, exercise and the body.

conversation she had with a recently married young woman who missed living with her mother, as she preferred her life as a daughter to her new life as a wife.⁷¹ In the following issue, another young wife experienced exactly the opposite feeling. Right after the wedding, her husband left for South America and the young wife could not reunite with him because of the war and had to move back in her family home. The young wife loathed living with her parents again after having experienced the joy of sharing a house with her beloved husband.⁷² In both cases, recently married women who felt unhappy about their situation could relate to the problem and find solace in Clementina's words.

The most notable change in the column came in 1943, when Clementina began to offer specific responses to her readers' letters. For example, on 15 April, she replied to a letter of reproach written by a woman called Marisa, who criticised Clementina for her inconsiderateness towards all women who had lost their home due to the war: 'tu che rimpiangi il tuo appartamento di città che sai però di ritrovare, non comprendi di urtare così la suscettibilità di tante donne che quella casa non l'hanno più'.⁷³ Clementina replied informing her readers that just three days earlier her apartment in Milan had been destroyed in an air raid, putting herself in the same position as the reader and sharing the same suffering. She also highlighted how she forced herself to write about more cheerful topics to try to distract her readers rather than add her pain to theirs, confirming *Grazia's* aim to entertaining and divert: 'Marisa, il mio compito è di dipingere sempre un po' più bella la realtà, di ravvivare le vostre speranze, di non accrescere le vostre pene con la narrazione delle mie'.⁷⁴

As a guide on how to be a good wife, 'Vivere in due' offers a vivid testimony of what it meant to be an ordinary woman during the late years of the Fascist regime, in the light of Fascist ideals which were sometimes but not always possible to attain, and it represents a clear example of *Grazia's* embrace of the predominant Fascist precepts. Nonetheless, like Luciano's column, Clementina's articles also acknowledged the reality of Italian women's lives at the time, addressing the real problems women could experience in the home or the workplace, the need for financially supporting the family in the wartime, and everyday marriage problems.

⁷¹ 'Nostalgia della casa materna', *Grazia*, 4 February 1943, p. 28.

⁷² 'La nostra casa', *Grazia*, 11 February 1943, p. 28.

⁷³ 'Alle mie lettrici', *Grazia*, 15 April 1943, p. 28.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Clementina's column is, then, another representative example of the multidimensional nature of Italian women's experience in the last years of the Fascist regime, and of the different models of femininity they were exposed to, as reflected in *Grazia's* multi-layered image of womanhood. Although in 'Vivere in due' the predominant message echoes the Fascist ideal of *sposa e madre esemplare*, throughout the magazine it is possible to find modern models of femininity complementary to the Fascist ideal, often delivered by a visual subtext. The regular presence of make-up advertisements next to Clementina's column, for example, point to both a modern form of consumption, and to the attention paid by women to a model of beauty closer to modern glamor than to the Fascist *angelo del focolare*.⁷⁵

The importance of this column also lies in the interaction between author and readers, whose letters are often mentioned and sometimes quoted. These exchanges offer significant insight into the thoughts and worries of many Italian women. Although the letters only reflected a portion of Italian population, the popularity of *Grazia* and its commercial success make it a relevant indicator of Italian women's thoughts, dreams, and social habits in this period. Similarly, the column dedicated to all readers' letters, 'Grazia vi scrive', is another primary source rich in information about Italian women during the Fascist era, which shows further evidence of the presence of modern models of womanhood in spite of the predominant Fascist rhetoric, similar to that already analysed 'Essere donna' and 'Vivere in due'. 'Grazia vi scrive' is the focus of the following section.

2.6 *Grazia's* advice

Like 'Lettere a Mura' in *Lei* (later *Annabella*), 'Solo per te – lettere a Sonia' in *Eva*, and 'Risponde lei' in *Gioia!*, *Grazia* had an advice column in which it responded to the readers' letters, providing advice and comments to the readers. Although the advice column was part of the Italian women's periodicals evolution started in the 19th century, proving a continuity in the history of women's periodicals, in the 1930s women's *rotocalchi* were characterised by a direct dialogue with their readers, which turned the *rubriche della posta* into a crucial feature of these

⁷⁵ Advertisements often proposed new beauty products, particularly make-up and anti-aging moisturisers. They are a clear example of a modern consumeristic consumption and its coexistence with Fascist precepts.

magazines and a distinctive symbol of the popular readership targeted.⁷⁶ The formula of an advice section was popular in all women's *rotocalchi*, but 'Grazia vi scrive' used a colloquial language that highlighted the intimacy between the reader and the magazine, and read more intimately than other advice columns. *Grazia's* use of a familiar tone, here as elsewhere in the magazine, was evidenced by the lack of the polite form, which gave the impression that the magazine's authors intimately knew their readership.

Grazia structured its advice column only quoting the name – often a pseudonym – of the author of the letter, followed by *Grazia's* answer. 'Lettere a Mura' had the same structure, with the reader's name in bold and Mura's answer never quoting the content of the letter, making the two columns look alike. However, the writing style, and approach to the readership, differentiated the two columns: Mura wrote like an expert, distancing herself from the readers, whereas *Grazia* adopted a friendly tone, answering as someone close to the author of the letter.

In December 1939, for example, Mura wrote to 'Roma Torino 9222': 'Scrivetemi pure liberamente. Indirizzate presso "Annabella". Vi risponderò al più presto'.⁷⁷ A week earlier, *Grazia* provided a similar answer to 'Cilena': 'Aspetto presto la tua lettera, e farò il possibile per aiutarvi'.⁷⁸ Both advice columnists gave the same response, but the tone of the two answers was completely different. *Grazia's* answer was colloquial and friendly; Mura, on the other hand, used the polite form of 'voi' (which substituted the 'lei' abolished by the Fascist regime),⁷⁹ and her answer read professional and detached. Another example further demonstrates this difference:

Giovane fascista 1921. Sì, è bene non far regali, per nessuna ragione. Il regalo più bello che si può fare a una persona alla quale si vuol bene, è una parola d'amore. Ed è già molto nella vostra condizione. Mi auguro che il vostro fidanzato prenda presto il suo diploma, che si metta a lavorare e che subito coroni il vostro comune sogno di gioia. ('Lettere a Mura').

⁷⁶ This change also marks a change in the readership targeted; as Enrica Cantani put it, glossy magazines such as *La Donna* and *Lidel* featured 'poca posta, perché le donne ricche non hanno problemi di cuore', quoted in Dittrich-Johansen, 'La "donna nuova"', p. 837. See also Silvia Franchini, 'Cultura nazionale e prodotti d'importazione: alle origini di un archetipo italiano di "stampa femminile"', in *Donne e giornalismo*, pp. 75–109 (particularly pp. 98–109).

⁷⁷ Mura, 'Lettere a Mura', *Annabella*, 20 December 1939.

⁷⁸ 'Grazia vi scrive', *Grazia*, 21 December 1939.

⁷⁹ On the campaign against the use of the polite form 'lei' see Bruno Cicognani, 'Abolizione del lei', *Corriere della Sera*, 1938, reproduced in *Eia, eia, eia alalà*, p. 361, in which Cicognani launches the campaign against the 'lei' defining it a symbol of 'secoli di servitù e abiezione'.

Maria Franca 19 – Se egli viene spesso nel negozio di tua madre, può trovare da sè [sic], se lo vuole, l'occasione di avvicinarsi a te. Altrimenti è inutile che sia tu a prendere iniziative non servirebbero a niente. Come *liquidarlo*? Che brutta parola! E poi non mi sembra il caso di usarla per uno che non ti ha mai dimostrato una sua speciale simpatia. ('Grazia vi scrive').⁸⁰

Although *Lei* and *Grazia* look very similar, both in content and appearance, Mondadori's aim to make a magazine that read like a conversation with a friend makes *Grazia* an original product, differentiating it from other women's *rotocalchi*.

As already mentioned, 'Grazia vi scrive' appeared from the start in *Grazia*. It was a regular column, initially simply signed by 'Grazia', as if it were the magazine itself – the *amica al vostro fianco* – who talked directly to its readers. In the few issues of 1938, the column occupied two pages in the middle of the magazine. Each answer had a title that summarised the main import of the advice, followed by the response and the name of the author. One letter, on the right side of the second page, was highlighted in italics. By December 1938, the appearance of the column had already marginally changed and some of the answers to readers' questions were highlighted by a frame or the use of italics, as showed in the picture below.

In the first issue of February 1939, for example, two answers were written in italics and put in a frame focused on hair style under the title 'Bellezza': 'Spazzola molto i tuoi capelli e ammorbidiscili con buone brillantine liquide. Pettinali tesi. [...] Sono assai più di moda le teste lisce di quelle troppo ondulate. Non tagliare i capelli, si portano lunghi', wrote *Grazia* answering the first letter, revealing details on the predominant hairstyle in 1939.⁸¹ The second answer suggested a hairstyle that might helped the reader ('Didi 1911') to make her face look thinner.

In this issue, the magazine answered 14 letters, addressing each reader with the intimacy and honesty of a friend, as the following two examples demonstrate:

Col tempo – Cara, il rapporto che mi descrivi, così come s'è svolto finora, mi sembra più un legame di simpatico che altro; una simpatia che poteva cambiar nome se i vostri temperamenti fossero stati fatti apposta per intendersi; ma non mi pare, se bastarono i due futili episodi che mi narri ad offendere la vostra armonia.

⁸⁰ Mura, 'Lettere a Mura', *Annabella*, 20 December 1939; 'Grazia vi scrive', *Grazia*, 21 December 1939, p. 26.

⁸¹ It is worth mentioning that in 1939 the predominant hairstyle of Hollywood actresses was curly hair, contrary to the hairstyle fashion suggested here by *Grazia*. See for example *Photoplay*, July – December 1939.

Cambiar metodo – Amica mia, lo sai che con l'orgoglio e ripicchi si guasta tutto? Nel tuo caso io consiglierei di mettervi d'accordo [...] dopo questo proposito, potrai riprendere la tua amicizia e parlare di argomenti un po' più profondi che ti aiuteranno a conoscere gli altri e a legarti per affinità di gusti, per reciproca ammirazione di certi sentimenti che le scaramucce di ora ti hanno fatto ignorare. Con affetto.⁸²

The absence of any explicit quotation from the letters eased the process of identification discussed earlier, as anyone could read an answer as a response to their own problems, making *Grazia's* advice accessible to anyone experiencing a similar issue.

Throughout 1939, the column went through a number of changes, and by the end of the year it looked entirely different. Three pages of the magazine were now devoted to the column, the eye-catching second, third, and fourth pages. Therefore, 'Grazia vi scrive' became the very first column a reader would see opening the magazine. This change also affected the column's appearance, which only had the first answer highlighted in italics, whereas names of readers and titles disappeared. Some of the answers were shortened, and the name of the reader who sent the letter became the title of each response, as shown by the following example: 'Eti. Non badare a tante sciocche superstizioni; sono cose che non hanno alcuna importanza. Per le tue pustoline sarà bene che tu faccia una cura interna'.⁸³

In some cases, the response was only one sentence long, making it intelligible only to the author of the letter. However, this change did not affect the number of readers who asked for advice. On the contrary, the responses published grew to more than 20 in each issue, demonstrating the popularity of the section.

The women who wrote to *Grazia* asked for advice on various issues, from fashion style to personal doubts, as the following examples from 1940 show:

Delle contrarietà, per quanto gravi siano, non devono farti dire che odi la vita; le contrarietà di superano, con viso più o meno sorridente, ma non devono indurre in nessun modo ad odiare. [...]

Quest'anno sono molto di moda, per chi sappia sciare bene, i calzoni a fuso.

⁸² 'Grazia vi scrive', *Grazia*, 4 January 1939, p. 20.

⁸³ *Grazia*, 14 December 1939, p. 3.

[...] Tessuto gabardine e tinta rosso scuro. Accompagnali con maglioni di colori vivaci.⁸⁴

However, women were not the only readers who wrote to *Grazia*; men also sent letters, also asking for advice. It was not common for men to write to women's magazines, and those who did were a minority. From the answers given by *Grazia*, it emerges that they were mainly young men aiming to be fashion illustrators or novelists: 'i tuoi scritti sono ancora immaturi per la pubblicazione [...] le poesie poi hanno troppe reminiscenze scolastiche trapiantate di sana pianta', wrote *Grazia* to one reader in December 1939.⁸⁵ Some of them, a minority of the minority, asked for advice on women and love life: 'Fate bene a farvi vedere un po' sostenuto. Per lo meno in tal modo riuscirete a provocare un po' di sincerità da parte della donna che amate', read an answer published in the same issue;⁸⁶ 'Ho passato la tua lettera a Clementina che dedicherà un articolo al tuo caso. All'assidua lettrice di cui parli non sfuggirà certamente. Spero che l'effetto giovi a te, che hai ragione', replied *Grazia* to another men in early 1940.⁸⁷

The fact that some men wrote to *Grazia* asking for advice on their talents or love life can be taken as a demonstration of the popularity of weeklies – and particularly of *Grazia* – suggesting the magazine was often read by other members of the family (or at least this was the impression the editors wished to give).⁸⁸

A further important change to 'Grazia vi scrive' occurred in March 1941, when the section started to be signed by 'Ita'. As discussed in the introduction to the magazine, many regular contributors only signed their pieces with a pseudonym or their initials, leaving their identity unrevealed. This is the case of Ita, who, as far as we know, could have easily been the author of the section all along. However, a change in the tone of the answers is noticeable, and the responses became more ironic and personal.

One of the new elements of Ita's advice were references to her own private experience, as seen in her first response to one of the rare letters from men, on 6 March 1941:

⁸⁴ *Grazia*, 18 January 1940, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Grazia*, 14 December 1939, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Grazia*, 29 February 1940, p. 2.

⁸⁸ This makes even harder to estimate the number of readers of a magazine in 1930s. See Lombardo, Pignatelli, *La stampa periodica*, pp. 93-95.

Il guaio è, caro Floc disperato, che probabilmente tu non hai ancora incominciato a raderti. [...] Per finire ti dirò quel che mi diceva il nonno quando ero giovinetta. A dieci anni: – Papà è un dio. – A quindici: – Papà non capisce niente. – A venti: – Papà capisce ma è in arretrato. – A trenta: – Papà aveva ragione. Non dimenticarmi, Floc!... Ti giuro che non sono Socrate. Neanche sua figlia, te lo giuro.⁸⁹

Ita's use of memories of her own life increased the connection with the reader, creating a more vivid sense of a conversation within two friends, as the following examples show:

Una fervente ammiratrice: M. C. – Quando ero bambina avevo una cuginetta di diciott'anni che si disperava di non riuscire a superare il metro e cinquanta di altezza. Il giorno che mio nonno seppe la ragione dei suoi pianti, le tirò gli orecchi e le disse: – Sciocchina, non sai che in piccola botte ci sta buon vino?⁹⁰

Ita sposterà un aviatore – [...] Mi hai conquistata di colpo. Così vorrei che fossero tutte le ragazze della tua età. Così dovrebbero essere. Ti abbraccio, confidandoti che da bambina io volevo sposare mio Padre.⁹¹

Maria Luisa Iametti – Anch'io cara amica, ho visto mostri che ingoiano carta e vomitano a migliaia pagine stampate, anch'io ne ho subito il fascino. [...] Ero allora poco più che adolescente e già lavoravo di penne di notte e di giorno, in ogni ritaglio di tempo, a scapito degli studi e con grande indignazione della mia famiglia che negava ogni merito al mio lavoro.

Quel giorno nei forni della grande Casa Editrice [...] un altro odore mi colpì: sudore umano, terra, olio, sangue, tutte queste cose e altre insieme. E fu tale la mia esaltazione che davanti alla rotativa uscii a dire con slancio: 'Ah, mi ci butterei dentro!' [...] 'Il motore dell'Arte è l'audacia', questo è il mio motto. Se ti riesce servilo, cara e impetuosa amica. Ti auguro di non pentirtene un giorno.⁹²

The answer to 'Maria Luisa Iametti' is particularly revealing: Ita talks about her experience as a writer and, more importantly, as an employee. This letter offers two crucial pieces of information. First, it demonstrates how among *Grazia's* readers there were women in employment; second, it offers a first-hand testimony of women in the publishing sector. Ita described the difficulties she had to face in order to become a writer, encouraging the reader to pursue her dream. In her answer, Ita emerges as a modern woman who followed her dream 'a

⁸⁹ 'Grazia vi scrive', *Grazia*, 6 March 1941, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *Grazia*, 13 March 1941, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Grazia*, 26 June 1941, p. 2.

⁹² *Grazia*, 13 November 1941, p. 2.

scapito degli studi e con grande indignazione della mia famiglia che negava ogni merito al mio lavoro'.⁹³ Most importantly, Ita's answer is another example of the modern model of woman offered by *Grazia*, as already seen in 'Essere donna' and 'Vivere in due', in spite of their predominant Fascist rhetoric.

As part of the changes brought to the column by Ita's style, it can be noticed the light hearted tone of her answers, especially when addressed to young readers, highlighting how *Grazia* became a point of reference for teenager as well as young women:

Sogni d'oro – Ah, tu sei la frequentatrice della quinta ginnasiale! Congratulazioni. Tutto quello che mi dici è bello salvo lo stile e la scrittura e il resto. Però come vorrei avere i tuoi quindici anni per scrivere letterine simili, cara, piccola pasticciona! (13 March 1941)

Orietta e Francesca. Eccomi qua, ma senza risposta perché ho dimenticato le domande, e non trovo più la vostra precedente lettera. Cosa volevate vecchie maramalde? Quello scuriccite mi è andato alla testa e non riesco a rimettermi in essere. Bene, se volete per telegrafo domande e risposte. Io aspetto, ma non scuriccita. Oh, no no, niente affatto scuriccita! Anzi allegrissima. C'è il sole e ho l'anima in festa! (26 June 1941)

Sogni d'oro – Ma certo che non 'ti mangio'. Giungi dopo un piatto di spaghetti alle vongole e dopo gli spaghetti alle vongole io non mangio che una pera. Il tuo peso è ben lontano dal segnare il giusto. Se lo tenessero così scarso i bottegai sarebbero tutti in prigione. Ti mancano quindici chili (13 November 1941)

Eva 1941 – Cara Eva, studentessa liceale, eccomi ai tuoi ordini. Come Virgilio ha fatto da guida a Dante, Ita farà da guida a te. Mi sia permesso il paragone eccelso. Vorrei condurti difilato in paradiso e senza passare per le terribili stazioni dell'inferno e del purgatorio. Mi ci provo. [...] La tua carta è bella. Lo fosse altrettanto la tua scrittura! (20 November 1941)

Ita engages in jokes with her readers, shortening the distance, and almost pushing to an extreme the colloquial style that characterised *Grazia* from the start. More importantly, these answers are revealing of the young age of some of the readers – 'Sogni d'oro' and 'Eva 1941', for example,

⁹³*Grazia*, 6 March 1941. Articles on women in employment, as mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, were part of *Grazia* since the beginning, demonstrating the relevant role of women in employment as a readership targeted by Mondadori. See for example 'Difesa della dattilografa', *Grazia*, 9 February 1939. On women in the publishing sector in the Fascist era see Elena Mosconi, 'Irene, Luciana, Mura e le altre. La cronaca mondana e di costume' in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano*, pp. 443–468.

were in high school –, thus providing some indication of the demographic of the readership reached by *Grazia*. The young age of these readers possibly explains Ita's friendly and playful tone. Her answers to the many readers who asked for advice on their love life – possibly the most popular topic in the advice column – sound in fact still friendly, but less ironic:

Trieste G. – Mia cara, dopo quattro anni una relazione non può essere ancora al punto del mezzo fidanzamento. È un po' tardi ora, per chiarire le situazioni. Rifletti: se quattro anni fa tu avessi messo quel giovine con le spalle al muro, della sua relazione con colei che tu chiami l'intrusa non resterebbe, forse, neppure il ricordo. Nel caso che egli avesse preferito rinunciare a te avresti potuto utilizzare meglio i quattro anni di giovinezza che hai perduto. [...] Non aver paura di perderlo. Se ti ama resterà; e se non ti ama, cosa avrai perduto? Un'illusione che poteva divenirti fatale. Spero che la tua fermezza non ti procuri un grande dolore [...] Se invece il destino ti sarà contrario uscirai da questa passione con la coscienza pulita e ancora nel bel fiore dell'età, per rivolgerti a un uomo più degno che possa darti una felicità sana e duratura. La meriti. Scrivimi presto. Aspetterò con ansia tue notizie. (10 April 1941)

Ho paura di fare il male – L'amore è il sentimento più nobile. Mascherare col suo aspetto qualsiasi altro moto dell'animo è adoperare un vero manto ed un vero scettro per la parte, direi, da commedia. Umili origini e mediocre cultura non escludono dignità e orgoglio. Se l'uomo di cui parli possiede queste due virtù chiariscigli subito il tuo stato d'animo. Comprenderà e si farà forza. In caso contrario adotta il sistema della medicina, da somministrarsi a dosi crescenti. Cioè preparalo poco a poco. (4 December 1941)

Once more, Ita's answers provide insight into thoughts and lifestyles of the readers. In particular, 'Trieste G.' offers an example of a modern attitude, in this case towards love life. From a sentence in Ita's answer – 'della sua relazione con colei che tu chiami l'intrusa' – it emerges that the reader has been dating a man who is also involved with another woman. Nowadays, this would sound like a familiar and somewhat common situation among young adults, but in 1941 Fascist Italy, where prolific mothers were praised and bachelors discriminated, such relationships were not accepted.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ The adoption of the *Codice Rocco* in 1930 made adultery a crime. Women in particular were the target of this new legislation, which established a punishment of up to two years in prison for women found guilty of adultery. The *delitto d'onore* was included in the new legislation (article 587). See Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare*, pp. 114 and ff.; de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp. 89–90.

Among the popular topics, the readers' perception of their bodies and worries about their appearance emerges as important as their request for guidance in love life. Readers often requested advice regarding their figure, sometimes sending their weight and height to *Grazia* to have a response:

Nini – Non prendere pillole dimagranti o ti rovinerai la salute. Sei fiorente e fa di rimanervi. Pare impossibile che le bambine della tua età siano affette da simile mania. Floridezza è bellezza, ma nessuna lo vuol capire. Il tuo peso è normale. (13 March 1941)

Conca di smeraldo – Il tuo peso va d'accordo con la tua statura. Fa di non ingrassare evitando i farinacei, preferendo la verdura cruda, facendo del moto. Basterà. Auguri belli. (22 May 1941)

Vera, la noiosa – La tua ossessione è priva di fondamento, e crollerà, spero, se la scalzo con queste parole: 'pesi sei chili meno del giusto'. Goditi i tuoi spuntini ma non rinunciare alla ginnastica. (13 November 1941)

Licia Carla 1922 – Sei piuttosto magra, ma poiché è tanto diffuso il terrore di essere grassi non credo che la mia sentenza ti tolga la gioia di vivere. (20 November 1941)

Despite the Fascist model of beauty advocating a flourishing woman, a model which Ita also suggested in her answers, *Grazia's* readers worried about weighing too much. This can be considered proof of the limited effect of the Fascist propaganda with respect to models of beauty, as the answer to 'Licia Carla 1922' demonstrates: 'è tanto diffuso il terrore di essere grasse'.⁹⁵ The image of the average Italian woman during the last years of the Fascist regime that emerges from this letters is a woman who worried about her figure and her weight, and sought advice on becoming trimmer.

This overview of 'Grazia vi scrive' illustrates the personal relationship *Grazia* carefully built up with its readers, and the success of the formula adopted in 1938: 'Voi non siete una nostra lettrice: siete una nostra amica. [...] rivolgetevi a noi'. From 1941, in particular, Ita's friendly style and use of personal memories helped create an even more intimate bond with the

⁹⁵ Ita, 'Grazia vi scrive', *Grazia*, 20 November 1941.

readers. However, the real importance of ‘Grazia vi scrivo’ lies in the image of women which emerges from the letters. As shown by the large array of answers quoted in the magazine, the women who wrote to *Grazia* expressed a wide range of modern attitudes and anxieties. At the same time, Ita’s answers reveal the conflict between the Fascist ideal and the tastes of a more cosmopolitan modern womanhood; she proposed a model of beauty close to the Fascist regime’s, but, at the same time, encouraged women in employment, demonstrating once more the complex model of womanhood in Italy in the 1930s, as reflected in and promoted by *Grazia*. The Italian women who emerge from the readers’ letters were looking for advice on how to better deal with the conflicting images of womanhood disseminated by the Fascist regime, and conciliate traditional value with modern expectations and desires.⁹⁶

3. Conclusion

After 1943, Mondadori was forced to discontinue the publication of its magazines due to the effects of the war, which affected the whole publishing sector. *Grazia* was reissued as soon as the war was over, with the aim of retaining the bond created over the years with the readers. Nowadays, 80 years after the first issue, *Grazia* is still being published. It has become one of the most famous glossy weeklies worldwide. Although the main focus is now fashion, *Grazia* is still a point of reference for women who look for advice on love life, fitness and beauty.

The analysis of the first years of *Grazia* (1938-1943) reveals several different aspects of Italian society and its experience from the perspective of women. The Fascist rhetoric, which required them to be flawless mothers and wives, submissive and obedient but also strong and reliable, emerges through the issues, confirming how *Grazia* was a product of its time and its ideological constraints. Nonetheless, alongside the presence of the dominant Fascist culture, multiple elements of modern attitudes and habits emerge and coexist with traditional models, sometimes overcoming the Fascist rhetoric. *Grazia* is full of references to women in employment, reflecting the reality of women’s real lives at the end of the Fascist regime. Both ‘Essere donna’ and ‘Vivere in due’ demonstrate this, delivering traditional models and values to their readers, but acknowledging and supporting, at the same time, modern attitudes.

⁹⁶ Italian Fascism had a dual aspect in many spheres, such as architecture, literature, economics, culture, and arts. On the interaction between modernity and tradition in the Fascist regime see *Modernità totalitaria: il fascismo italiano*, ed. by Emilio Gentile (Rome: Laterza, 2008).

The presence of practical advice, together with some guidance on love-lives and housekeeping, contributed to make *Grazia* appealing to a wide range of readers, and reflected Mondadori's aim to shape a popular magazine accessible to any woman. By writing letters, sending pictures and participating in contests, readers were the focus of the publication and conceived of and appealed to as friends, and they contributed to make *Grazia* in turn everyone's friend. Reading *Grazia* was like being in a room with a friend, talking about everyday problems, sharing happiness and worries.

Readers were encouraged to participate to the creation of the magazine, and be active consumers rather than passive readers, a feature which marked a crucial change in women's magazines not only in Italy, but also in Europe and the United States. *Grazia* is therefore a key example of how women's periodicals in Italy evolved, following patterns created abroad, disseminating models of beauty proposed by Hollywood or by French magazines and, above all, bringing Italian values and traditions, adapting the foreign models to the Italian readership. In other words, by examining *Grazia* it is possible to see a multicultural dialogue shaping periodical press in the 1930s, but also specific features of Italian culture and society, and particularly the duality of women's lives caught between modernity and the Fascist ideal. Taken as a whole, these images of women in *Grazia* bring to light dichotomies and contradictions of cultural models that characterised the development of the Italian modern woman, making *Grazia* a significant source of information on the social and cultural changes occurring in Italy in the Fascist era.

CONCLUSION

By the time Mussolini was voted out of power by the *Gran Consiglio* in July 1943, *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia* had all ceased publication. *Grazia*, like many other women's magazines, including Rizzoli's *Annabella*, Rusconi's *Gioia* and Vitaliano's *Eva*, was relaunched after the war and its successful format was confirmed by its international success down to the present day, making it one of the longest running magazines in the history of the Italian popular press. The *rotocalco* formula launched by *Omnibus* was reproduced in *L'Espresso*, launched in 1955, which became one of the most prominent Italian news weeklies, whereas for its part, *L'Avventuroso*, although it did not survive itself into the post-war era, nevertheless imported into Italy an American model which is still noticeable in Italian comics and the wider culture, not only in comics such as *Tex*, or the Italian Disney characters, but also as part of a wider imaginary that conditioned young Italian readers decades after the last issue of *L'Avventuroso* was printed.

The three case studies examined in this dissertation, although they each present a very different aspect of the popular press in Italy at a very particular moment of in Italian political and cultural history, demonstrate together in certain aspects a shared model of popular print media production in Italy, showing not only strong evidence of the presence of multicultural dialogue and processes of nationalisation of foreign models and particular practices of publication and production, centred on individuals and small groups and particular techniques to appeal to readers, but also the increasing presence and sophistication of images, visual design and presentation in the popular press. In each magazine, images played a key role, as a means of entertainment, information, criticism, explanation and advertising. As discussed throughout the dissertation, images were used as a key means of expression in popular magazines, in a process developing in parallel and in dialogue throughout Western Europe and the United States. Italian *rotocalchi*, in spite of the presence of an extreme nationalistic regime which aimed at creating a pure Italian culture with no foreign 'contamination', throughout its rule and in particular intensity in the late 1930s, nevertheless echoed and adapted foreign popular print culture in both layout and content, reflecting the influence of American culture and other European models, such as *Marie-Claire*, *Vogue*, *Marianne*, *Uhu*, *Life* and *The New Yorker*. Inevitably, the mixed product and format that resulted reflected in complex ways the general modernisation of Italian culture and society, itself conditioned by both the Fascist regime and international models.

The complexity of the coexistence of a multicultural dialogue and Fascist ideology has been shown with particular force by the case of *Omnibus*, which clearly revealed both the difficult dialogue between the popular press and the Fascist regime, and the direct intervention of Fascist censorship on the *rotocalco* sector when it was not perfectly aligned with the regime's evolving cultural directives. Similarly, the case of *L'Avventuroso* demonstrated the striking impact of American comics on Italian print culture, disseminating the force of comics as a pure form of entertainment, whilst at the same time illustrating how the Fascist cultural campaigns and its direct censorship could lead to the closure of a magazine without the direct intervention of the Fascist authorities. Finally, *Grazia* echoed Fascist rhetoric more directly and enthusiastically than either *Omnibus* or *L'Avventuroso*, and it is the only one of the three magazines which did not cease publication because of Fascist cultural policy or intervention: *Grazia* was only suspended because of the impact of the war, which led Mondadori to flee to Switzerland. However, even in this case, the presence of foreign models and a modernising and necessarily complex attitude to everyday life can be noted in the pages of *Grazia*, showing the uneasy coexistence of traditional and Fascist models with modern, which often in the sector means imported, foreign aspirations and desires.

The dissertation has further shown the organisation of the publishing companies in the Italian sector, mainly based on a small group of intellectuals, writers or artists who contributed to different magazines and worked for different publishers often in intersecting networks, pointing to the peculiarity of the Italian publishing industry in the interwar years, when compared to the American and other European cases such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Italian magazine production was more localised and less professionalised, the figure of the publisher and the strong single editor was typically at the centre of creative as well as commercial processes, relying on a solid network of recurrent contributors, many of whom would go on to play leading roles in shaping the popular press in post-war Italy.

This dissertation has laid the groundwork for further, more in-depth comparisons between Italian, American and other European popular magazines and their production methods, design, distribution and readership. It has offered clear indicators of the intersections between these transnational spheres as well as an in-depth study of the Italian case. Further research in the field is required to highlight the mechanisms of multicultural dialogue between Western Europe and the United States in the 1930s, in spite of these countries' radically different political regimes in

the interwar years, which each in turn profoundly influenced and conditioned cultural production.

Finally, *L'Avventuroso*, *Omnibus*, and *Grazia* are revealing examples of how new forms of attention to and new sectors of readership became central to the Italian publishers and their commercial strategies, how readership was expanded and transformed by the multi-layered product that is the *rotocalco*. The three magazines were all created with a broad readership in mind, from different classes or from different sectors, such as women or the young, expanding the audience of the popular press and marking a new stage in the history of the modern mass print media in Italy. In other words, this dissertation's analysis of 1930s *rotocalchi* has confirmed and developed our understanding of the importance of the decade in the development of a modern Italian form of magazine production and consumption, and the significance of this form of popular cultural production beyond the lens through which it has been most commonly analysed until now, in relation to political analysis of the dynamics behind magazine production. Conversely, by examining the popular press as a mixed and new national and transnational product, the dissertation has pointed to the peculiarity of the conditions of the Fascist regime and its totalitarian ideology, by showing how the study of *rotocalchi* is also a useful primary source for the study of the uneven process of the nationalisation (and the fascistisation) of the masses, revealing the clear flaws and limits and ambiguous negotiations behind Fascist control over cultural production.

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