

LIKE NEEDLE AND THREAD: HOW WOMEN CONNECTED ITALY TO AMERICA AT THE HOUSE OF FARRAR, STRAUS

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THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES on the work of women who were involved in transnational literary exchanges from semi-professional, non-professional and temporary positions in the publishing industry of the 1940s and 1950s.¹ Recent developments in scholarship have evidenced the essential role played by mediators, with groundbreaking studies on literary agents and other professionals, thanks to the work of Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, Cécile Cottenet, Daniela La Penna and Sara Sullam.² As the scholarly debate unfolds, new research perspectives come forward. Michelle Levy and Robin Healey have demonstrated exhaustively that in the realms of publishing and translation, many have aspired to a professional status yet only a small minority have achieved it.³ This leads to the consideration that a vast sector of publishing culture and women's labour is yet to be examined as far as publishing is concerned: for the many professionals who are receiving scholarly attention, there are many more unresearched semi-professionals, non-professionals and temporary professionals.⁴ In order to explore the cultural contribution, career trajectories and working conditions of these individuals, I will present a number of women who were variously related to the same publishing house and worked on a specific corpus of texts.

While a perspective centred on professional roles, such as full-time literary agents or translators, would lead to a focus on individuals who achieved long-term careers and full professional standing in the publishing system, I propose here to consider the several women who intervened in a determined cultural process: the transmission, translation and reception of Italian literary works in the United States in the wake of the Second World War. This perspective will lead to a more capacious understanding of the disparate roles played by a multitude of highly skilled individuals who, despite having bridged several social *milieux* and been vital to the restoration of transatlantic relationships in the aftermath of the Second World War, appear to have been systematically excluded from professional status. Due to the nature of these women's involvement in publishing, their labour does not appear in scholarship, with few recent exceptions:⁵ their work can in fact be detected only by looking at archival papers. Many of them worked in publishing intermittently or temporarily, and even operated independently from economic rewards. Nonetheless, as I'll show, they significantly contributed to shaping the publishing culture and literary history of their time.

Based on the research I carried out at the archives of the New York Public Library, Boston University and the University of Texas, I will reconstruct the contributions of

women like Elma Baccanelli Laurenzi, Eleanor Pettinos Blow, Gioconda Savini Prezolini, Nancy Lenkeith Horneffer, Sheila Cudahy Pellegrini and Marianne Ceconi Gifford.⁶ I will concentrate on their collaborations with the publishing house founded by John Farrar and Roger Straus, which – also thanks to the work of the women cited above – became a leading publisher of translations from Italian into English in the United States, and one of the principal trade publishers in the American system during the second half of the twentieth century. My claim is that while these women played secondary or temporary roles in the publishing industry (and, more specifically, at Farrar's and Straus's firm), their contributions were crucial to shaping transatlantic literary relationships and constructing the cultural discourse around Italian literary works in the United States.

Through this case study I wish to foster further reflections on research perspectives and methodologies. If, as Kate Ozment wrote, 'feminist book history involves not only the study of women and their work, but also unpacking the male bibliographic tradition that has rendered certain books and authors as marginal',⁷ a feminist approach to the publishing history of the twentieth century requires us to critically reflect on how the availability (or scarcity) of archival materials keeps pushing certain categories of individuals and cultural practices to the margins of the researchers' attention.

Who Brought Italian Books to American Publishers?

During the mid- and late 1940s, Italian literature became a hunting ground for American publishers on the lookout for quality translations, in much the same way as French literature had become fashionable amongst US imprints.⁸ Compared to France, though, the publishing and literary topography of Italy was less clear to American cultural agents. Communication between publishers in Italy and the United States had weakened throughout the 1930s as a result of growing political tensions, and culminated with four years of total silence during the conflict. When the war ended, American publishers involved all the available mediators. Some of them were Italian academics and intellectual expatriates, others were Americans who had lived in Italy during the interwar period, while others worked for the Office of War Information and were travelling between the United States and Italy. Individuals who traditionally belonged to the publishing *milieu*, such as writers, agents and academics, were involved alongside others from different backgrounds. While the translation and reception of Italian literary works has already received some attention, available studies barely mention – when not overlooking completely – the many women intervening in the process. Cottenet has demonstrated that in order to reconstruct a faithful picture of the transnational literary field, researchers need to look beyond the binary opposing cultural mediators to commercial intermediaries.⁹ The archival records I have examined invite a further step, challenging the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals of culture and literature.

The first translation from Italian published by the house of Farrar Straus, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* by Carlo Levi (1947), is an illustrative example of how women with semi- and non-professional roles in publishing were essential to the restoration of transatlantic literary relationships. The path of Levi's work from Italy to the United States is also indicative of the peripheral position Italy occupied in the supranational network of relationships which at that time encompassed France, the United Kingdom

and the United States. As recorded in the correspondence of the publishing house, in fact, it was not an agent or a scout of Farrar Straus who found Levi's book. Nor was Sanford Greenburger, a literary agent operating in New York and collaborating with Carlo Levi's Italian publisher, Giulio Einaudi, the one who enabled the first transatlantic contact to take place. It was an Italian American woman acquainted with both the author and the American publisher, Elma Baccanelli, who at the time was stationed in Italy and had a solid literary background. Baccanelli had known one of the founders of the firm, John Farrar, since her university years: she had been Farrar's teacher of Italian while studying Romance Languages and Literatures at Columbia University. There, incidentally, she had been the student of another mediator between Italy and the United States, Giuseppe Prezzolini.

In May 1944, while the Allies were advancing northwards towards Rome, Baccanelli crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the SS *James Parker* with Natalia Danesi Murray, whose memories offer an account of the trip.¹⁰ Both Baccanelli and Danesi Murray, who later would become a literary agent for the Italian publishers Mondadori and Rizzoli in the United States, worked for the Office of War Information (OWI). Baccanelli's itinerary in Italy suggests that her involvement with the OWI had the purpose of monitoring the Italian intelligentsia at a delicate cultural and political juncture. After a layover in Morocco, on 21 June 1944 Baccanelli met with Benedetto Croce in Naples.¹¹ Shortly after that, she reached Rome: in the hungry capital which had just been liberated, Italian intellectuals, militants and politicians were welcome to eat – and be monitored – at the Psychological Warfare Branch's canteen. Baccanelli's daughter recalls:

Doors were open and fettuccine with bolognese sauce was offered to partisans, anti-fascist activists, intellectuals, writers, artists, poets, journalists of some calibre. . . . The Allied officials who joined knew Italian well enough to follow the conversation. While they fed their guests, they listened very attentively to their dialogues and took notes if needed. . . . while providing for them, they kept them stealthily under control.¹²

While in Rome working for the OWI, Baccanelli met with leading figures of the Italian cultural scene such as Mario Pannunzio, Ennio Flaiano, Sandro Penna, Carlo Cassola, Alberto Moravia, Umberto Saba and Ignazio Silone. With the anti-fascist Jewish writer Carlo Levi she established a lasting bond of friendship. A mutual friend of Baccanelli and Levi, the journalist Carlo Laurenzi, would become Baccanelli's husband in 1947.

These personal bonds allowed Levi's book to find an interested publisher far earlier than professionalised channels would have allowed: between late 1945 and early 1946, when Baccanelli sent the manuscript of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* to John Farrar offering herself as a translator, the newly founded imprint Farrar, Straus had not yet even printed its first catalogue. As noted by Boris Kachka, the connection with Carlo Levi paid the house of John Farrar and Roger Straus with 'enormous dividends': it became the bridgehead for a transatlantic connection which would grant the publishers a wealth of literary prestige, new authors and bestselling books.¹³

The recommendation of a non-professional was not enough, though. Baccanelli's parcel wandered from one office to another until a comment by the literary scout Eleanor Pettinos sparked the interest of John Farrar and Roger Straus, who started looking for a professional translator immediately after this.¹⁴ Just as the needle leads the way

through the cloth, but only the thread remains visible later, Baccanelli and Pettinos fostered a connection which had lasting effects. While scholarly works on Carlo Levi's reception in the United States focus on the long-term professionals of the cultural system such as Max Ascoli, John Farrar and Sanford Greenburger, an exhaustive examination of archival papers leads to crediting Baccanelli and Pettinos with a remarkable mediating role, which has been recognised recently by Luca Beltrami.¹⁵

After the first contact with the house of Farrar and Straus, Levi grew reluctant to sign a contract with them. In Italy his book had been issued by a distinguished house, Einaudi, and he probably doubted a new firm could do his work justice. The prestige of John Farrar's and Roger Straus's firm, in fact, was yet to be established.¹⁶ According to the ensuing correspondence, the proposed contract was also below Levi's financial expectations. Communication stagnated until 1 March 1946, when Eleanor Pettinos met Levi in Rome, winning his confidence and setting the negotiations going in earnest.¹⁷

Achieving a final agreement required a collective effort, activating an extended nexus which involved professionals of publishing, friendly connections and trusted acquaintances alike: the mayor of New York and former boss of Baccanelli, Fiorello La Guardia; the academic Max Ascoli, an anti-fascist intellectual who expatriated to the United States and was a reference point for Italian and Jewish anti-fascist circles; the journalist Michael Kamenetzky, a Jewish Italian of Russian descent who was an old friend of Baccanelli's fiancé Carlo Laurenzi; the Italian writers and employees of Einaudi, Natalia Ginzburg and Massimo Mila; and finally, the literary agent Sanford Greenburger.¹⁸

As a professional literary agent and the representative of Levi's Italian publisher, Greenburger was theoretically the main interlocutor of Farrar, Straus, but surviving correspondence evidences the pivotal role played by Baccanelli, Ascoli and Pettinos. Baccanelli gathered information on standard royalties for literary translations, advised Levi and directly contacted John Farrar via mail and telephone, pushing for a more favourable contract for Levi. She also thought of a clever operation of cultural and symbolic entrepreneurship for launching *Christ Stopped at Eboli* in grand style, garnering full attention from the press.

In addition to being a writer and an activist, Levi was in fact also a painter, and was planning to visit the United States in April, when the book was scheduled for publication, accompanying Italy's former premier and partisan leader Ferruccio Parri. Baccanelli suggested organising an exhibition of Levi's paintings in New York during that visit, and collaborated with Pettinos, Ascoli, and Levi's publishers in the United States to carry out her plan. The result was a triumph of publicity: Levi was reviewed and interviewed widely, and almost stole the scene from Parri. *Christ Stopped at Eboli* was recognised as one of the most significant translated books of 1947 by journals and literary critics, and came to epitomise Italy's postwar literature in the American cultural sphere.¹⁹

The positionality and trajectories of Baccanelli and Pettinos in the American publishing system of the time are starkly different. Baccanelli was a well-educated young woman attempting to start a career as a literary translator; Pettinos, instead, had been travelling to Europe and attended Italian and French literary parlours since the 1920s, and had just become Farrar and Straus's literary consultant. Baccanelli wouldn't pursue her literary ambitions for long: when *Christ Stopped at Eboli* hit the front pages of the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Herald Tribune*

Weekly Book Review,²⁰ she had already taken on a new role as the director of the Foster Parents Plan in Italy.²¹ Pettinos, instead, continued her trips between Florence, Paris and New York, animating the literary scene in Florence, organising charity concerts in New York for restoring the orchestra of Teatro Comunale in Florence, and tipping off Farrar and Straus on another golden book, Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian*. She carried on her activity as a literary scout until her premature death in 1950.²²

Despite their differences, both Baccanelli and Pettinos were informally involved in the transmission and translation of Carlo Levi's book. Baccanelli never worked for Farrar and Straus, who rejected her as a translator and tried to neutralise her intervention in Levi's favour,²³ yet took advantage of her labour and kept communicating with her so as to seal the translation contract and publish Levi's book with the widest resonance. Pettinos, instead, was regularly rewarded for her reading services, but the records of the publishing house contain no proof that her work as a literary scout was ever financially rewarded or formally recognised.²⁴ Considering that her travels to Europe preceded her collaboration with Farrar, Straus, and payment receipts appear sporadically in her correspondence with the firm, it seems logical to infer that only services such as readings were paid for, while Pettinos travelled independently using her own fortune. Professionals such as the publishers, the literary agent and the author enjoyed the benefits of Pettinos's tours and networks, while her work of transatlantic intermediation remained on a non-professional, pro bono basis.

Another woman who was involved semi-professionally in Farrar Straus's contacts with the Italian literary system is Gioconda Savini, at that time the secretary of the Casa Italiana at Columbia University. She worked in that role from 1930 until the early 1960s, when she married Giuseppe Prezzolini and relocated to Italy. The title of 'secretary' might give the impression that Savini's career was distant from the literary side of publishing, but an in-depth analysis of archival sources as well as published materials suggests a different reading.

If one reads Prezzolini's *Diari*, one learns that Savini's work was crucial for allowing the incredible pace at which Prezzolini published his books and journal articles, and helped him constantly until her death in 1981.²⁵ The *Diari* were published more than forty years ago, but none of the academic works on Prezzolini published since then mentions Savini's supportive labour – with the exception of my monograph on Prezzolini's transoceanic epistolary friendship with the Italian writer Goffredo Parise.²⁶

Documents published by Olga Ragusa suggest that probably Savini had arrived too early at the Casa Italiana for working there as a scholar. Columbia had in fact appointed its very first woman assistant professor in 1929, would tenure its first female faculty member in 1937, and would see organised protests denouncing the discrimination against hiring women as faculty only in 1969.²⁷

In 1944 Harry Morgan Ayres, who at the time directed the Casa Italiana, proposed Savini for career advancement in the following terms:

She has been at the Casa Italiana from the beginning and in a very real sense is the Casa Italiana. In addition to her many duties as a secretary she [. . .] carries on extensive and valuable research in support of the various projects of the Casa. . . . She is in short a scholar in her own right.²⁸

The quoted text implies that the proposed position was a scholarly one, while Ragusa's silence on the result of Ayres's endeavour suggests it was unsuccessful. For sure, Savini's scholarly and literary activity was not confined to the Casa Italiana. She carefully curated relationships with the house of Farrar, Straus for both herself and her companion Prezzolini,²⁹ recommending new and old books for translation regularly throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The rich correspondence stored at the Archivio Prezzolini proves that she was the main interlocutor for relationships with the firm: Savini's messages to John Farrar and Roger Straus sometimes included remarks or paragraphs by Prezzolini, but letters to the publishers were hers, first and foremost. Records in the archive of the publishing house, moreover, evidence one more instance of intermittent paid reading services accompanying informal activity as a mediator: while Savini received payments for reading Italian books under consideration for translation, the literary recommendations she offered to John Farrar and Roger Straus were evidently *pro bono*.

Reconstructing the stories of Baccanelli, Pettinos and Savini leads to the acknowledgement that, in varying ways, all of them worked in publishing from a liminal space, with semi-formalised or informal agreements – a realm that needs to be further explored as far as the twentieth century is concerned – which seem to characterise feminine labour within the publishing system at this point in time. More importantly, these women were active across several backgrounds: military and social work in the case of Baccanelli, patronage and literary parlours in the case of Pettinos, out-of-sight intellectual work in the case of Savini. This made relevant information scattered and scarce, but is also characteristic of transatlantic connections between Italy and the United States in the postwar years, when the professionalised networks which would foster the many translations issued during the 1950s and 1960s were yet to be built.

Co-constructing the Discourse on Italian Literature

Women taking part in the publication of Farrar, Straus's translations from Italian did not act exclusively as scouts and intermediaries: while playing such roles, many also influenced the process of translation and reception of Italian novels in the United States, acting indeed as mediators.³⁰ They worked as literary journalists and translators, and played an active part in the construction of the cultural discourse around Italian postwar literature in the American literary field. The traces they left in the public sphere need to be identified, examined and connected with what happened out of public view. In this section I will focus on some of their interventions in the press.

In February 1947, when new translations from Italian had not yet captured the attention of the American readership and preparations for the launch of Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* were in full swing, Eleanor Pettinos sketched the landscape of contemporary Italian literature for the readers of the *New York Times Book Review*. In her article, she described Italian literature as a 'resurgence', a combination of 'the Renaissance and the Risorgimento'. Pettinos announced to the readers that Italy had a 'whole crop of new, young authors who have more to say and who appear to say it better than those from any other European country'.³¹ Among these authors, Carlo Levi was presented first, mentioning his success in Europe and his imminent publication in the United States and United Kingdom.

Many other writers presented in the article by Pettinos would be translated and published in the United States soon after: Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (*In Sicily*, New Directions, 1949, with a foreword by Ernest Hemingway); Corrado Alvaro's *L'uomo è forte* (*Man Is Strong*, Knopf, 1948); Natalia Ginzburg's *La strada che va in città* (*The Road to the City*, Doubleday, 1949); Dino Buzzati's *Il deserto dei tartari* (*The Tartar Steppe*, Farrar, Straus & Young, 1952). It would be simplistic, though, to infer that the publishers followed the leads in Pettinos's article. Her piece seems to serve multiple purposes, and could be seen as a public emergence of the many processes in which Pettinos was involved at the time.

The research I have carried out on journal databases evidences that, on one hand, Pettinos was introducing authors who did not yet enjoy the attention of the American press: Buzzati and Ginzburg had not been mentioned before, but would receive further coverage after this first appearance. An in-depth cross-examination of archival papers, on the other hand, reveals that in her article Pettinos was in fact publicising forthcoming and prospective translations in which she was involved. She was informally in charge of the editorial work on Alvaro's *Man Is Strong* at the house of Knopf,³² Farrar and Straus's direct competitor, and advising Farrar, Straus on Silvio Micheli's *Pane duro*, which was also mentioned in the article and was being considered for translations in the very weeks the article was issued.³³

Following the tracks in Pettinos's publications leads to the conclusion that she exerted her influence at various levels of the cultural system: as a reader, as a scout, as an editor and as a literary journalist. Being an external collaborator who worked semi-formally and intermittently, Pettinos played all these roles, but was not publicly associated with the firms she collaborated with. Her temporary involvement in each one of these roles makes her contribution harder to track, and would make her an inconspicuous presence in a research perspective based on a single professional role.

Similarly to Pettinos, the scholar, translator and literary critic Nancy Lenkeith had no public association with the house of John Farrar and Roger Straus. She reviewed books for the *New York Times* and taught English at Queens College after obtaining a PhD at Columbia University. As a literary critic, she discussed most of the contemporary translations from Italian, including Giuseppe Berto's *The Sky is Red* (New Directions, 1948), Ennio Flaiano's *The Short Cut* (Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1950), Giuseppe Marotta's *San Gennaro Never Says No* (Dutton, 1950), Elio Vittorini's *The Twilight of the Elephant* (New Directions, 1951) and Vasco Pratolini's *A Hero of Our Time* (Prentice-Hall, 1951).

The archival records I examined demonstrate that, like Pettinos, Lenkeith was a reader for the Italian books under consideration at the house of Farrar, Straus. From her liminal position, she acted as a mediator both from within and without the firm, recommending books for translation as a reader and framing newly issued translations as a reviewer.

A cultural actor who contributed to the literary transfer from Italy to the United States from a more prominent position is Frances Frenaye. She collaborated with Farrar, Straus as a translator as well as a reader when, in August 1949, she wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* to present several 'Modern Italian Novelists'. Many had just been published or were about to be published in translation. By mentioning them, Frenaye was promoting the work of fellow translators as well as facilitating the promotional work of publishing houses with which she collaborated or was in contact. In

her piece Frenaye also drew the public's attention to some untranslated authors, such as Cesare Pavese. Archival records show that his books were being considered for translation at Farrar, Straus on Frenaye's advice right at that time. After discarding *Il compagno* due to its 'untimely' (i.e. communist) political content and *La bella estate* due to its alleged untranslatability, Frenaye and Farrar, Straus would finally opt for *The Moon and the Bonfires*, issued in 1953 and reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* by the same Frenaye.³⁴

Alongside promoting newly issued and forthcoming books of publishers who were working with her (or might be interested in doing so in the future) and breaking the ground for authors who were yet to be translated, Frenaye also intervened in the discourse that was forming around Italian literature in the United States, criticising oversimplifications and presenting her readers with a historicised, nuanced picture of the Italian literary landscape: 'Despite the current American impression,' she stated in the opening of her piece, 'contemporary Italian literature does not begin with Carlo Levi.' She rejected the key concept of 'renaissance', which had rapidly become a buzzword in pieces about Italian literature, countering that if there had been 'something of a "renaissance" in Italian writing since the war', it was 'at least in part a renaissance in translations'.³⁵

Exploring Pettinos's, Lenkeith's and Frenaye's interventions in the press allows us to examine dimensions of transatlantic literary exchanges that would go unnoticed in a study which focused solely on their professional role within the house of Farrar, Straus. Reconstructing their contribution to the cultural discourse demands bridging the discrete roles they played through thorough research on archival holdings, and calls for a critical examination of available documents. As Michelle Levy has stated in her seminal *Do Women Have a Book History?*, focusing only on the commercial side of book trade 'obscures the overlapping and intertwined nature of the more informal practices by which many books were produced'.³⁶ Similarly to the Romantic era examined by Levy, during the mid-twentieth century gendered agents appear to occupy informal, fluid and overlapping roles. Based on the reconstruction I carried out by cross-examining archival holdings and published materials, the contribution to transnational publishing by women working at Farrar, Straus clearly appears to exceed the boundaries of the professional, semi-professional and non-professionalised roles they played. Their interventions presented the Italian literary landscape to a broad audience of readers, while their comments on the books they read for (or recommended to) Farrar, Straus structured the firm's publishing programme, became part of book jackets and promotional ephemera, and percolated in reviews by other critics.

Innovators and Semi-professionals of Cultural Translation

According to the testimony of Peggy Miller, who worked as Roger Straus's assistant for two decades, the firm hired its first women editors not earlier than the late 1960s. Prior to this date, all editors were men, and women were either assistants or external collaborators, with just one exception: Sheila Cudahy. Cudahy was an innovative publisher who played a pivotal role in the transmission and translation of some of the most popular Italian titles of the postwar years. Among her feats, the publication of *The Little World of Don Camillo* by Giovanni Guareschi is probably the most remarkable.

As the founder of two growing imprints, Cudahy had a high professional profile, but her career was subject to disruptions and sudden turns. She was heiress to a fortune resting on the growing revenues of the Cudahy Packing Company, a meat-packing firm based in Illinois. Cudahy fell in love with Italian literature during her college years at Barnard and graduated at the Casa Italiana of Columbia University run by the aforementioned pair of mediators, Giuseppe Prezzolini and Gioconda Savini. There Cudahy met an Italian émigré, George Pellegrini, whom she married in 1943. A brilliant young scholar, she composed several records for the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* alongside other pupils of Prezzolini, who supervised the Italian section.

Cudahy and Pellegrini founded Ariel Books in 1947 (although it had been active since 1946), and Pellegrini & Cudahy. That year they visited Europe as publishers for the first time. For the firm bearing her name, Cudahy was able to acquire two works of contemporary Italian fiction: Ennio Flaiano's *The Short Cut* (soon reviewed by Len Keith, as mentioned above), and Giovanni Guareschi's *The Little World of Don Camillo*.

Don Camillo, a small-town priest battling with the communist mayor, Peppone, was the perfect protagonist for a bestseller of the Truman era. To ensure the book's success, Cudahy deliberately reworked the English translation, revising, cutting and sometimes rewriting the text, as reconstructed by Lawrence Venuti.³⁷ In this way, Cudahy attuned the text to the values, the mindset and the language of the Cold War American public. She replaced the Britishisms and the complex English forms characterising Una Vincenzo Troubridge's translation with American colloquialisms; she deleted sixteen stories referencing contemporary Italian politics and public figures; and she omitted or rewrote passages that would have been puzzling for readers. She merged secondary characters, asked Guareschi to write a new preface, and rewrote passages that could have been perceived as offensive. She went as far as asking for reading feedback from Catholic editors before printing the book, in order to ensure that it would not be 'interpreted either as disrespectful or as in some way too sympathetic of Communism'.³⁸ To introduce Don Camillo to a diverse national audience she serialised stories from the book in elite as well as mass-audience newspapers and magazines, with specific attention to religious periodicals. Finally, Cudahy invested an impressive amount of money (\$10,000) in advertising, and quickly sold a wide range of subsidiary rights. The result was a resounding success, repeated with each of the following volumes featuring Don Camillo – from which the house of Farrar, Straus would earn the most.

Pellegrini's premature death in September 1952 would in fact leave Cudahy with the whole publishing business to manage. In the spring of 1953, Farrar, Straus acquired both Pellegrini & Cudahy and Ariel Books: Cudahy became an editor of the house, newly named Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, and sat on its board of directors until 1961, when she left publishing to become a full-time writer.

Similar processes characterised other translations from Italian taking place at Farrar, Straus, but were complicated by the semi-professional status of the women involved. A few months after Cudahy's success with *The Little World of Don Camillo*, John Farrar started working on the translation of Carlo Levi's new book, *The Watch*. The second of Levi's works published by Farrar, Straus, *Of Fear and Freedom* (1950), had not sold well, and the house wished to bring the author back to the attention of the public.

As reconstructed by Beltrami, the translation process of *The Watch* involved many individuals. Frances Frenaye worked on the text first. The archives don't reveal how much of the original text she translated, nor the extent to which her work was re-used for subsequent versions of the translation.³⁹ What can be gathered by combining the correspondences between the publishing house, Max Ascoli and Carlo Levi⁴⁰ is that Frenaye was already working on *The Watch* in May 1950, when the contract for the translation was still underway. Later, possibly in November, Frenaye's translation was handed over to Carla Pekelis, née Coen.

Similarly to Lenkeith, Carla Coen Pekelis had fled from Europe during the Second World War, reaching the United States in 1941. While Lenkeith was returning to her home country, though, Pekelis reached America as a Jewish refugee. She took care of her family, until in 1946 the sudden death of her husband, the jurist, scholar and activist Alexander Haim Pekelis, left her to provide for her five children and mother-in-law. An international network of support was rapidly organised, led by Ascoli, who was a friend of the late Pekelis and related to Carla. After having lived in the shade of her husband, Coen Pekelis embarked on new endeavours as an academic, translator and literary scout. It was probably Ascoli, who often mediated between Carlo Levi and his American publisher, who proposed her as a translator for *The Watch*,⁴¹ although she may already have been in contact with the firm through social circles she had in common with John Farrar and Roger Straus.

By 31 January 1951, the translation had been handed over once again. Coen Pekelis had given up her translation commitment for a full-time job in a non-publishing position that was more financially stable. She would resume her interest in publishing several years later.⁴² As John Farrar wrote to Levi: 'We have lost Carla to an all-absorbing new job at the Italian Handicrafts. She is sad about it, but her need for the future is great and this offers her a big chance. Also, she was getting very tired.'⁴³ In that same letter, Farrar informs Levi about how the translation work is being completed:

Please do not hesitate to make any suggestions – any at all. You run no risk of offending me as with the ladies [. . .]. I am working now with Marianne Ceconi Gifford, recommended by Carla and various others. Mrs. Gifford is Italian, lived much in Rome, married to an American, very quick, sensitive to your work and with the free time to spend on it. She has a wide knowledge of Italian literature, both classical and modern. She is not one of these terrible females, either. She has humility for you and her work. She is, like Carla, a most gracious lady and with the well-being of Carlo Levi at heart. [. . .] I think you should know at this point that the method is that of having the lady read aloud to me, while I, in effect re-work the translation. This means that the rhythm of the translation will be, I think, the same throughout and I am hopeful that it is having something of the richness and the power of your style.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, after this phase the English text still needed revisions. Archival holdings state that in March some portions of the translation were being rewritten. The work was finally completed in May 1951, with a final emendation by Ascoli and Levi, amounting to the fantastic total cost of 2,500 dollars: 2.5 times the price of Frenaye's applauded translation of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, professionalisation was certainly a powerful force at work in the American publishing system: manuals on how to enter the business were addressed specifically to women⁴⁵ and, as reconstructed by James West and Cécile Cottenet, women were taking on more and more clerical jobs in publishing.⁴⁶ At the same time, as illustrated by the case of women working at Farrar, Straus on Italian novels, a sizeable amount of the labour required by transnational publishing was carried out by skilled women who worked as semi-professionals and non-professionals, with intermittent or temporary commitments, and sometimes independently from immediate economic rewards. This occasionally had counterproductive effects on total costs and the manageability of workflows, as showed by the case of Carlo Levi's *The Watch*, but overall fostered a broad process of cultural translation that cost publishers comparatively little. Baccanelli Laurenzi, Savini Prezzolini and Coen Pekelis, who relied on other jobs as their main source of income, either interrupted their endeavours in publishing or kept having to take on auxiliary roles. Others, such as Lenkeith Horneffer and Ceconi Gifford, discontinued their commitments in publishing after a few years of intensive work. Despite good professional results, they appear not to have fully traversed the threshold between semi-professional and full professional.⁴⁷ Women who had enough capital to foster their own literary circles and publishing endeavours, like Pettinos Blow and Cudahy Pellegrini, achieved a greater degree of agency, but weren't able to continue their activities for more than a few years for personal reasons. Of all the women who intervened in transatlantic relationships with Italy at the house of Farrar, Straus, only Frances Frenaye Lanza had a lasting career as a translator, mediator, reader and scout.

John Farrar's letter quoted above states plainly what was expected from a woman in the workplace: to comply humbly and graciously with requirements, to offer 'free time' as a source of cheap labour, and to contribute to undertakings which oftentimes wouldn't be publicly credited – such as the translation of Levi's *Watch*, Prezzolini's publications, and the Italian connections that enhanced Farrar and Straus's publishing enterprise. These expectations, alongside the misogynistic tone of the letter, mirror the public discourse on women's labour recorded at the beginning of the anti-feminist best-seller *Modern Woman*, which circulated widely at the time. According to the authors, women were 'only a labor reserve'.⁴⁸ In those same years, the leading sociologist Talcott Parsons maintained that women's subordinate role was necessary to the flourishing of the economy and the stability of society.⁴⁹

Despite the attitude of their contemporaries and the instability of their appointments, women non-professionals and semi-professionals were a shaping force in the publishing system. They fostered transatlantic literary connections through collaborations and networks that are still largely uncharted. Studying the case of women connecting Italy to the United States at the house of Farrar, Straus allows for exploration of a segment of these collaborations and networks.

Similarly to the needle leading the way through the cloth, these women offered an irreplaceable support to the transnational circulation of books, and significantly contributed to the translation and reception of Italian novels in the United States. They created and fostered connections, often through personal channels and many a time independently from direct financial gain. They mediated, translated and reviewed novels as active

constructors of the literary discourse. Many of them did so while playing multiple roles: their trajectories challenge researchers and scholars to think of more capacious research methodologies. Critical reflection on archival and historiographical lacunae is needed to detect the discrimination at work in the publishing system of the mid-twentieth century, and avoid replicating it in scholarship on the topic. This will enable the drawing of a more realistic picture of transnational publishing and transatlantic literary connections, affording us a more inclusive and therefore robust understanding of cultural as well as literary dynamics in their several dimensions.

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Notes

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2. Among the many works contributed by these scholars, I am indebted to Daniela La Penna and Sara Sullam, 'Introduction: Translating Modernism: Cultural Geographies and Mediating Agents', *Letteratura e letterature*, 14 (2020), 49–54; Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, 'Histoire culturelle, études américanistes: une conversation transatlantique', *Revue Française d'études américaines*, 155 (2018/2), 3–18; Cécile Cottenet, *Literary Agents in the Transatlantic Book Trade: American Fiction, French Rights, and the Hoffman Agency* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Sara Sullam, 'Illuminating Botteghe Oscure's British Network', *Modern Italy*, 21 (2016/2), 171–84.
3. Levy's claim regards the publishing system during the Romantic era, and holds true for the twentieth century; Healey's assertion regards the realm of translations, and is specific to the scope of this chapter. Cf. Michelle Levy, 'Do Women Have a Book History?', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53 (2014/3), 297–317 (p. 303); Robin Healey, *Italian Literature since 1900 in English Translation: An Annotated Bibliography 1929–2016* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), p. xix.
4. Cf. Ruth Panofsky, *Toronto Trailblazers: Women in Canadian Publishing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); *Modernism and Collaboration*, ed. by Claire Battershill and Alexandra Peat, *Literature and History*, 28 (special issue) (2019/1); Elisa Bolchi, 'Un pilastro della "Medusa". Alessandra Scalero nel carteggio con la sorella Liliana', *Tradurre*, 14 (2018), 1–21; Caterina Fiorani and Massimiliano Tortora, *Il Novecento di Marguerite Caetani* (Roma: Edizioni Di Storia e Letteratura, 2017); Laura Claridge, *The Lady with the Borzoi: Blanche Knopf, Literary Tastemaker Extraordinaire* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2016); Lorenzo Salvagni, 'In Marguerite Caetani's Literary Salon', in *Elsa Morante's Politics of Writing: Rethinking Subjectivity, History, and the Power of Art*, ed. by Stefania Lucamante (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), pp. 105–16; *A Living of Words: American Women in Print Culture*, ed. by Susan Albertine (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995); Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester and Agnes Pivot, *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors* (London: Minority Press Group, 1981); Marjorie Dana Barlow, *Notes on Woman Printers in Colonial America and the United States 1639–1975* (New York: Hroswitha Club, 1976).
5. As work on this chapter draws to a close, the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas) inaugurates an exhibition titled *Women and the Making of Joyce's Ulysses*, curated by Clare Hutton, which is dedicated to the important and largely unacknowledged role of women in the realisation and promotion of Joyce's masterpiece. Concerning the women I focus on in this chapter, Sheila Cudahy's work was examined in Lawrence Venuti, 'The Bestseller', in *The Scandals of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 124–57; and Eleanor Pettinos Blow, Elma Baccanelli and Carla Pekelis appear in Luca Beltrami, 'Carlo Levi nella corrispondenza di John Farrar e Roger Straus', *La rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 124 (2020/2), pp. 352–61.
6. As I mention these individuals for the first time, I present them with their maiden name followed by their married name, in order to facilitate their identification.
7. Kate Ozment, 'Rationale for Feminist Bibliography', *Textual Cultures: Text, Contexts, Interpretation*, 13 (2020/1), 149–78 (p. 164).
8. Cottenet, *Literary Agents*, pp. 57–63.
9. Cécile Cottenet, 'L'agent littéraire et l'histoire culturelle transatlantique: poursuite d'un dialogue interrompu', *Revue française d'études américaines*, 155 (2018/2), pp. 74–87.
10. Janet Flanner, *Darlinghissima: Letters to a Friend* (New York: Random House, 1985), pp. 3–21.
11. Benedetto Croce, *Taccuini di guerra: 1943–1945* (Milano: Adelphi, 2004), pp. 161–2.
12. Laura Laurenzi, *La madre americana: un'educazione sentimentale nell'Italia della Dolce Vita* (Milano: Solferino, 2019), pp. 15–16. My translation. Original quote in Italian: 'Porte aperte e fettuccine al ragù per partigiani, attivisti antifascisti, intellettuali, scrittori, artisti,

- poeti, giornalisti di qualche peso [. . .]. Gli ufficiali alleati che si mescolavano ai commensali conoscevano la nostra lingua abbastanza bene da poter seguire la conversazione. Così, mentre rifocillavano gli ospiti, ascoltavano i loro discorsi con estrema attenzione e se era il caso ne prendevano nota [. . .] sfamandoli li tenevano felpatamente sotto controllo.’
13. Boris Kachka, *Hothouse: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art at America's Most Celebrated Publishing House, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), pp. 39–103 (p. 86).
 14. Sources differ in attesting what reached John Farrar first, the manuscript sent by Baccanelli versus Pettinos's tip; certainly, Baccanelli and Pettinos cooperated towards the launch of Levi's book; cf. New York Public Library, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, Inc. records (hereafter FSG), Box 203, Folder: Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, General 1946–64; Max Ascoli papers (hereafter MAP), Box 141, Folder 8.
 15. Cf. Beltrami, ‘Carlo Levi nella corrispondenza’. Baccanelli's and Pettinos's contribution was not acknowledged in previous works, including Luca Beltrami, ‘Carlo Levi nella cultura americana tra gli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta’, *Forum Italicum*, 50 (2016/2), pp. 417–36; Patrizia Guida, ‘Christ Stopped at Eboli, la traduzione americana del 1947’, in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli di Carlo Levi*, ed. by Antonio Lucio Giannone (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2015), pp. 109–24; Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin, ‘Christ stopped at Eboli: fortunes of an American translation’, in *The Voices of Carlo Levi*, ed. by Joseph Farrell (Oxford, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 175–208.
 16. Cf. Kachka, *Hothouse*, pp. 17–186.
 17. FSG, Box 203, Folder: Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Foreign 1946–62, memo reporting a cable from Eleanor to Farrar and Straus Company Inc., 1 March 1946.
 18. Cf. Laurenzi, *Madre americana*, p. 89; FSG, Box 203, folders: Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Foreign 1946–62; Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, General 1946–64.
 19. Cf. Beltrami, ‘Levi nella cultura americana’; Guida, ‘Traduzione americana’; Ó Cuilleaináin, ‘Fortunes of an American Translation’.
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 21. Michela Ponzani, *Figli Del Nemico: Le Relazioni D'amore in Tempo Di Guerra, 1943–1948* (Roma: Laterza, 2015), pp. 69–94, 131–50.
 22. Eleanor Pettinos was murdered by a former lover while in Italy; cf. ‘Bare Romance of NY Woman Slain in Rome’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 July 1950, p. 28.
 23. Cf. FSG, Box 203, Folder: Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, General 1946–56, letters dated April 2, 6, 10, 17, 1946; Kachka, *Hothouse*, p. 49.
 24. While several folders of the publisher's correspondence contain proof of payment for reading services, there are no traces of a formal agreement around Pettinos's activity as a scout for the house of Farrar, Straus. Cf. FSG, Box 203, Levi folders; Box 271, Parise folders; Box 273, Pavese folders; Box 306, Romano folders.
 25. Cf. Giuseppe Prezzolini, *Diario 1942–1968* (Milan: Rusconi, 1980), pp. 241, 290, 293, 294, 303, 366.
 26. Giulia Pellizzato, *Prezzolini e Parise: un'amicizia transoceanica. Edizione critica e commentata del carteggio (1951–1976)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2021).
 27. ‘Women at Columbia’, ed. by Robert A. McCaughey <http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_events/symposia/history_women_timeline.html> [accessed 2 January 2022].
 28. Letter dated 10 November 1944, quoted in Olga Ragusa, ‘Quando gli archivi parlano’, in *Giuseppe Prezzolini: The American Years 1929–1962*, ed. by Silvia Betocchi (New York: S. F. Vanni/Gabinetto G. P. Viesseux, 1994), pp. 39–62 (p. 43).

29. Beltrami describes a similar pattern when relating the support Linuccia Saba granted to her husband, the aforementioned Carlo Levi; cf. Beltrami, 'Levi nella cultura americana'.
30. On the distinction between intermediaries and mediators cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 38.
31. Eleanor Pettinos Blow, 'Readers and Writers in Italy: A Report from Italy', *New York Times Book Review*, 9 February 1947, pp. 35–6 (p. 35).
32. University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Alfred A. Knopf Inc. papers, 32.12, letter of Blanche Wolf Knopf to Frances [Frenaye] Lanza, 8 January 1948.
33. FSG, Box 273, folders: Cesare Pavese, General 1948–1968 and Cesare Pavese, *Moon and the Bonfires* General 1951–5.
34. Frances Frenaye, 'The Traveler Returns: *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese', *New York Times Book Review*, 24 May 1953, p. 4.
35. Frances Frenaye, 'Modern Italian Novelists', *New York Times Book Review*, 21 August 1949, p. 24.
36. Levy, 'Do Women Have a Book History?', p. 300. An ever-growing body of bibliographical information uncovering women's involvement in the making and circulation of books during the long eighteenth century is freely available online thanks to the Women's Print History Project, directed by Levy <<https://womensprinhistoryproject.com>> [accessed 27 July 2023].
37. Venuti, 'The Bestseller'.
38. Quoted in Venuti, 'The Bestseller', p. 139.
39. Luca Beltrami, 'Carlo Levi nella corrispondenza', pp. 357–60; Luca Beltrami, 'Carlo Levi e l'edizione americana dell'*Orologio*: ricognizione su alcune carte d'archivio', *Critica Letteraria*, 166 (2005/1), pp. 87–109 (pp. 103–6).
40. FSG, Box 203, Folder: Carlo Levi, *The Watch* Foreign 1950–53; MAP, Box 187, Folder 6.
41. Levi argues this in a letter to Ascoli; cf. MAP, Box 187, Folder 6; letter of Carlo Levi to Max Ascoli, 15 March [1951].
42. Carla Pekelis, *A Dictionary of Colorful Italian Idioms* (New York: Braziller, 1965); Carla Pekelis and Arianna Ascoli, *La mia versione dei fatti* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1996); Carla Pekelis, *My Version of the Facts* (Evanston: Marlboro Press, 2005).
43. FSG, Box 203, File: Carlo Levi *The Watch* Foreign 1950–53, carbon copy, letter of John Farrar to Carlo Levi, 31 January 1951.
44. FSG, Box 203, File: Carlo Levi *The Watch* Foreign 1950–53, carbon copy, letter of John Farrar to Carlo Levi, 31 January 1951.
45. Marjorie Shuler, Ruth Adam Knight and Muriel Fuller, *Lady Editor: Careers for Women in Publishing* (New York: Dutton & Co., 1941).
46. James West, *American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 88; Cottenet, *Literary Agents*, p. 100.
47. Both of them kept working for a few years, but left their respective activities subsequently. Marianne Ceconi would translate Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires* (Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953), Goffredo Parise's *The Dead Boy and the Comets* (Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953) and Ugo Zatterin's *Revolt of the Sinners* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), receiving flattering reviews by literary critics. Nancy Lenkeith wrote more book reviews and later switched to an exclusively academic career.
48. Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 8.
49. Cf. Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), pp. 52–6. In Rosenberg's words, Parsons' claim as an influential academic was that 'by providing emotional support at home, women freed men to play "instrumental" roles in the economic world beyond, making possible increased productivity and abundance for all' (p. 54).