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Agency in Translation: The Case of Tito N. Sarego's Fascist-Era Translation of *The Sittaford Mystery*

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Abstract

This article investigates the Italian translation of Agatha Christie's novel *The Sittaford Mystery* to discern the extent to which the alterations imposed on the translation, which was produced at the time of Mussolini's Fascist regime, were motivated by a necessity to confirm to the dominant ideology or were an expression of the translator's own agenda.

Focusing on the changes operated on the source text that were ostensibly driven by the directives of the Fascist regime, the present study examines specifically how Sarego's treatment of female characters and of references to sensitive issues such as war and race can be seen as showcasing the translator's alignment with Fascist ideals rather than passive compliance.

Contrary to common assumptions made about translations published under Fascism that tend to attribute manipulations to the regime's mandates, this study reveals that Sarego's own convictions played a pivotal role in shaping the translation and foregrounds the importance of recognizing translators' agency. On the other hand, it also highlights the importance of acknowledging the influence exerted by the dominant translation practice of that time on the translator's work.

Keywords: translation; Fascist Italy; translator agency; Agatha Christie

Agency in Translation: The Case of Tito N. Sarego's Fascist-Era Translation of *The Sittaford Mystery*

When translations are produced in a context that is markedly charged from an ideological point of view, such as a dictatorial regime, it is natural to ask how great of an impact this context might have had on the final translated product. Indeed, in the case of translations produced at the time of the Italian Fascist regime, substantial attention has been paid to how the activity of translation was influenced by the constraints imposed by the regime and to how agents of translations, such as translators, editors and publishers, had to manipulate translations in order to expunge from them any elements that might have angered the censors.

However, as Rundle and Sturge (2010, p. 7) correctly remind us, "the phenomenon of censorship in translation is far from unique to Fascist or other totalitarian regimes." The Catholic Church's control over thought in Italy, for instance, had long predated the Fascist regime and would last long after its demise; moreover, secular censorship was in place in various Italian states even before the unification of the country (Palazzolo, 2006). At the same time, translations had to be inserted into a specific literary tradition and face the scrutiny of a literary establishment that was not overly enthusiastic of seeing foreign works succeed when Italian-authored books struggled to sell.

Therefore, there existed a variety of constraints more or less interconnected to the regime that could affect the way in which foreign texts would be presented to Italian audiences. Nonetheless, the existence of these constraints should not eclipse the fact that agents of translation still had some agency, both over the selection of which works of foreign literature to translate and over the strategies to adopt in the translations of these texts (Cipriani, 2019). What form did this agency take? Was it defiant of existing norms and regulations or compliant?

Previous scholarship's contributions on the practice of translation under the Fascist regime have hinted at the fact that different publishing houses exhibited differing degrees of "zeal" and compliance with the regime and that even within the same publishing house different attitudes towards the practice of translation could coexist, either due to the series in which the translations would be published, because of a translator's own ideology or other factors.[1]

The diverseness in findings about translations produced under the Fascist regime highlights the importance of expanding the corpus of analysis to include more translations and translators, in order to gain a better understanding of the landscape of translation and accurately assess what motivated a translator's strategy and solutions.

In an effort to move closer to this goal, this study examines the Fascist-era translation of Agatha Christie's *The Sittaford Mystery* by Tito N. Sarego, titled *Un messaggio dagli spiriti* and published in 1935. The novel's formulaic structure makes it a is a good representative of the clue-puzzle detective fiction from its time and does not express any particular ideological or political position that would have required adjustments to be adapted to the context of Italian Fascist where it was translated and published. Therefore, the potential alterations imposed on the source text can be expected to provide some insight in the translator's decision process and, possibly, ideology. At the same time, being a detective-fiction novel, the translation of *The Sittaford Mystery* would still need to be mindful of the scrutiny of both the regime and the literary establishment which, as I will explain in the next section, expressed profound discontent with the success of this genre.

In order for the study to have a clearer focus, I will only consider alterations that, at least on a surface level, could be interpreted as motivated by diktats of the Fascist regime. Warranting separate analysis, Sarego's plentiful alterations to Christie's style will not be included in this discussion.

1 See for instance Nottola (2010), Del Zoppo (2014), Barrale (2015), Abbatelli (2017), and Filanti (2018).

1 Translation and Detective Fiction under Fascism

The 1930s in Italy are often called "Decennio delle traduzioni": Author Cesare Pavese originally used this term to refer to a kind of avantgarde translated literature mainly enjoyed by the elites, but it is undeniable that in that decade Italy saw a massive influx of translations of foreign works, especially popular literature, that significantly reshaped the Italian literary market (Rundle, 2021). In fact, translations were so popular that, according to the *Index Translationum*, Italy was the first producer of translations in the world (Rundle, 2010b).

The popularity of translations at that time might seem a surprising phenomenon. After all, in the 1930s, Italy was under Mussolini's Fascist regime, which strove to assert the superiority of the Italian nation and strongly advocated for cultural autarchy. The fact is that, initially, the regime did not consider translation as an inherently seditious activity that could undermine the status quo (Rundle, 2010b), but rather as a means of cultural exchange and advancement (Rundle and Sturge, 2010). That is, the regime was willing to accept translations because it thought they showed the Italian race's ability to "'assimilate' other races, particularly from a cultural and linguistic point of view" (Fabre, 2014, p. 27), it understood they benefited the publishing sector and could contribute to the modernization of the country's literary landscape.

However, when towards the middle of the 1930s it became clear that Italy was considerably more receptive to foreign influence than it was successful in exporting its own literature and culture abroad, dependence on translations came to be seen as a sign of weakness and translations "as a threat to the integrity of the national culture and language" (Rundle and Sturge, 2010, p. 8). This turn in the regime's attitude toward translation was also a response to the imposition of sanctions on Italy by the League of Nations for invading Ethiopia, an event which prompted the regime to embrace more fiercely nationalistic views and, consequently, to begin imposing censorial measures specifically targeted against translations (Rundle, 2010b).[2]

2 For more information on the specific measures adopted by the regime between 1936 and 1945, see

The stricter approach adopted by the regime toward translation was warmly welcomed by Italian literary elites, which for years had attempted to halt the uninterrupted flow of translations on the Italian market. Perceiving translations, which were much better received by the public,[3] as a threat to their livelihoods, Italian authors had since the 1920s decried this invasion of foreign literature and denounced it as a malady corrupting the tastes of readers (Rundle and Sturge, 2010). In order to solve their problem, the literary establishment launched two campaigns against translations. The first (1933–34) specifically targeted publishers, accusing them of being unpatriotic for publishing so much foreign literature at the expense of Italian authors (Rundle, 2010b), but failed to elicit any response from the regime. The second (1936–38), coinciding with the regime's intensification of its nationalistic agenda and alienation from several European countries, was more successful and saw the promulgation of measures controlling the publishing houses' output of translations.

Although specific censorship measures were not imposed on translations until 1936, publishers were still cautious about what they published in translation. In fact, they had a set of censorship criteria, more or less official, aimed at preventing translation from being seized by authorities after publication, thus avoiding financial loss: Issues to be avoided included criticism of Italy and of allies or praise of enemies, as well as support of socialism, communism, pacificism and expressions of anti-war sentiments, abortion, suicide, depictions of female sexuality and any content that might contravene Fascist or Catholic morality (Nottola, 2010).

Consequently, publishing houses had to attentively sort through novels to ensure that they did not feature such "taboo" topics too prominently. This first selection was often done through "reader's reports," that is, documents that usually provided a summary of a novel, an assessment of its literary value, suggestions for its potential placement in a certain series, and judgment on its translatability. Then, if novels were deemed

Rundle (2004), Bonsaver (2007).

3 Preference for foreign fiction could be ascribed to the fact that Italian literature often prioritized form over content and was exceedingly thick (Rubino, 2010).

fit to be translated but contained shorter passages that could be problematic from a moral or ideological point of view, publishing houses resorted to preventive self-censorship and omitted or altered those parts of the source text that might alert the censors.

Highbrow fiction, due to its more pointedly politicized nature, might have been the main target of censors, but middlebrow and popular literature accounted for the largest share of translated literature circulating in Italy during the Fascist Ventennio (Rundle, 2010a). And while Mussolini was willing to embrace foreign highbrow fiction as long as it could be used to "shape and educate the Italian mentality" (Fabre, 2014, p. 33), rarely were middle and lowbrow fiction considered to possess educative qualities that could benefit Italian audiences. Additionally, popular fiction appealed to broader strata of the population, particularly those that the regime considered "especially susceptible to external influence and in need of protection" (Rundle, 2018, p. 842). Therefore, the regime also closely monitored translations of popular fiction, fearing they might corrupt the minds of Italian readers.

Amidst all kinds of popular fiction, detective fiction quickly became one of the most successful among readers: Translated detective-fiction novels could sell tens of thousands of copies in a very short amount of time, whereas it might take years for an Italian author to sell a few thousand (Rundle, 2004). At the same time, it also quickly became the target of intense criticism from the literary elites and of strict measures imposed by Fascist censorship.

Even though detective fiction short stories and novels had been translated and written, although in smaller numbers, in Italy since the end of the nineteenth century, it was the launch of the "Libri Gialli"[4] series by publishing house Mondadori in 1929 that marked the beginning of the success of the genre in the peninsula. Solely featuring detective fiction works, mostly in translation, the series immediately achieved spectacular success, which led to the creation of two additional series

4 The name of the series, which would later come to define the entire genre, was inspired by the color of the covers of detective-fiction books: The covers were of a bright yellow, meant to attract the readers' attention.

by Mondadori: one offering the same titles published in "Libri Gialli" in a more affordable format ("I Gialli Economici Mondadori"), the other compiling several novels in a single volume ("Supergiallo").

The fortune enjoyed by detective fiction explains why the literary establishment so fiercely opposed it. Arguments against it included the accusation that it was morally corrupting and that it would incite readers to commit crimes in emulation, but also the fact that the stories depicted in detective-fiction novels were incompatible with Italian settings and with the morals of Italian readers (Dunnett, 2011). This suggestion that crime was an alien concept for Italian minds echoed Mussolini's assertion that, under the regime's governance, crime rates had dropped, a statement he had tried to substantiate by stopping newspapers from publishing articles related to violent crimes (Albonetti, 1994).

Detective fiction's constant reminder of the pervasiveness of crime, then, was one of the reasons the regime disliked the genre, the other being its over-reliance on translations. As a relatively new genre in Italy, Italian-authored works could not satisfy the high demand for detective fiction and, even when Italian authors attempted to write in this genre, their novels were frequently rejected by publishers due to perceived low quality.[5] Out of the 266 titles published in "Libri Gialli" between 1929 and 1943, over 85% were translations of foreign works.

While it is undeniable that the restraints imposed by the regime deeply influenced the work of translators, many of the extensive alterations imposed on translated texts stemmed from the necessity to conform to the dominant poetics. In order to circumvent anticipated objections from the Italian literary establishment, which perceived foreign translated works as competitive threats, translations were expected to maintain a high standard of quality, to not contaminate the purity of the Italian language with the use of foreign words and "to be adapted to current trends and to meet the regime's articulated taste for immediacy, fluency and captivating and appropriate themes" (Billiani, 2020, p. 141). In fact,

5 In his correspondence with Mondadori, Lorenzo Montano, the "father" of "Libri Gialli," often expressed exasperation with Italian authors of detective fiction and recognized the superiority of foreign authors (Gallo, 2002).

translators and editors frequently remarked that texts posing significant stylistic or lexical challenges, though morally and ideologically unimpeachable, presented greater translation difficulties compared to those that addressed taboo subjects under the regime's strictures (Barrale, 2017).

Another common rationale behind the alterations enforced on translated texts concerned economic factors. Translations were expected to be cost-effective and source texts often necessitated cuts to conform to predetermined length constraints set by publishing houses: for instance, a publisher intending to release a translation within a specific series might selectively omit episodes deemed nonessential to the plot in order to fit the translated work's length with that of other novels in the series. The decision to include a translation in a genre-specific series could also significantly influence the translation approach. For example, certain features of the source text might be accentuated and others minimized to underscore its genre classification (Del Zoppo, 2014).

The prevailing translation practices during the Fascist regime involved significant adaptation of texts to align with the cultural norms of the target audience, often disregarding the original works. Despite instances of translators adhering to an author-oriented approach that was respectful of the source texts (Nottola, 2010), the predominant tendency among practitioners was toward a freer approach, which frequently resulted in arbitrary modifications to the source texts. The following examination of Sarego's translation illustrates the prevalence of this tendency in detective-fiction novels as well.

2 *The Sittaford Mystery* and Tito N. Sarego

The Sittaford Mystery is one of the few standalone novels that do not feature any of Christie's recurring detectives or characters. It first appeared in 1931 in both the UK and the US, where it was published under the title *The Murder at Hazelmoor.* After the murder of Captain Trevelyan is announced during a séance at Sittaford house, Major Burnaby

leaves Mrs Willett's party and faces a snowstorm to go check on his friend, who lives six miles away. After the discovery of the Captain's dead body, his nephew is identified as the prime suspect. Emily Trefusis, the nephew's fiancée, sets out to prove his innocence. Aided by a young journalist, Charles Enderby, she will work indefatigably to discover who the murderer is. Other main characters include the residents of Sittaford village (Miss and Mrs Willett, Mr Rycroft, Captain Wyatt, Mrs and Mr Curtis, Miss Percehouse and her nephew Ronnie Garfield) and the policeman assigned to the case, Inspector Narracott.

Translated in Italy in 1935 as *Un messaggio dagli spiriti* ("A message from the spirits"), this was the sixth novel by Christie to appear in Mondadori's series "Libri Gialli." Referring to the séance that sets forth the events of the novel, the Italian title clearly hoped to capitalize on the "supernatural" element to attract readers. The translation was entrusted to Tito N. Sarego, who according to Mondadori's historical online catalogue, translated around twenty titles of detective fiction published in "Libri Gialli" between 1932 and 1939, making him quite a prolific translator.[6] His contributions to the publishing house ended abruptly even before the publication of the series was halted in 1941. It appears that he did not produce any translations for other publishing houses. Surprisingly, not only are Sarego's translations still circulating today, but some of them are also the only existing Italian translations of several of the novels he worked on in the 1930s, which makes an exploration of his contributions to translation even more warranted.

In discussing Sarego's contributions to the "Libri Gialli" series, online blogs for Italian aficionados of detective fiction repeatedly mention the

6 The titles translated by Sarego for "Libri Gialli" include: *L'affare D'Arblay* (*The D'Arblay Mystery*) by Richard Austin Freeman; *L'albergo dei quattro venti* (*The White Cockatoo*) by Mignon G. Eberhart; *La camera grigia* (*The Grey Room*) by Eden Phillpotts; Oro sommerso (*Doubloons*) by Eden Phillpotts and Arnold Bennett; *Le figlie dell'abisso; N.222* (*The Daughters of the Night; The Million Dollar Story*), *Il mercante di Siangtan* (*The Yellow Snake*), *La taverna sul Tamigi* (*The India-Rubber Men*), *Il volto nell'ombra* (*The Face in the Night*) by Edgar Wallace; *Orme nella sabbia* (*Mystery at Lynden Sands*), *Il segreto di una notte* (*The Case With Nine Solutions*) by J. J. Connington; *L'ultima sera* (*The Hanging Captain*) by Henry Wade; *Un messaggio dagli spiriti* (*The Sittaford Mystery*), *Se morisse mio marito* (*Lord Edgware Dies*), *La serie infernale* (*The A.B.C. Murders*), *Tragedia in tre atti* (*Three Act Tragedy*), *Carte in tavola* (*Cards on the Table*) by Agatha Christie; *Il manto di piume* (*The Feather Cloak Murders*), *La morte fa tic-tac* (*The Ticking Terror Murders*) by Darwin H. Teilhet; *L'opale di Nonio* (*The House of the Opal*), *La vittima sconosciuta* (*A Case For Paul Savoy*) by Jackson Gregory.

fact that his translations were often incomplete and that they clearly show the marks of Fascist influence (see for example: Amici, 2021).

As for scholarship, currently there are a few studies that reference Sarego's translation of Christie's *Lord Edgware Dies*, which focus on the supposed alterations imposed by him on the character of Carlotta Adams. Spurio (2011) claims that Sarego attributed to two characters racist remarks on Carlotta Adams's Jewish identity that were absent in the original, all because of Fascist propaganda.[7] This claim is not, however, correct: In his reference list, Spurio cites an American edition of *The Sittaford Mystery* published in 1984 by Berkley Books, which reads:

> Miss Adams, I think, will succeed. She is shrewd and that makes for success. Though there is still an avenue of danger – since it is of danger we are talking. – You mean? – Love of money. Love of money may lead such a one from the prudent and cautious path.
>
> (qtd. in Spurio, 2011)

As mentioned above, the US version of this novel was published under a different title than the UK version, the latter being the version that Sarego would have referenced. Could it be that more discrepancies existed between the US and UK editions? This seems to be the case, since one UK edition of the source text by HarperCollins presents the very same racist remarks that Spurio had attributed to Sarego's own agenda:

> Miss Adams, I think, will succeed. She is shrewd and she is something more. **You observed without doubt that she is Jewish**?[8]' I had not. **But now that he mentioned it, I saw the faint traces of Semitic ancestry.** Poirot nodded. 'It makes for success—that. Though there is still one avenue of danger—since it is of danger we are talking.' 'You mean?' 'Love of money. Love of money might lead such a one from the prudent and cautious path.'
>
> (Christie, 1933/2011).

7 The same claim is made by Di Spalatro (2024), who additionally marvels at the fact that, aside from Sarego's, another Italian translation published in 2001 would also feature such an addition.

8 Yet another version, refers to her as "a Jewess".

It is possible that the American publisher, perceiving the remarks about Miss Adams's ancestry as racist, opted to eliminate them. However, as the UK edition HarperCollins clearly proves, Christie did write them.[9] While it is still true that in Sarego's translation the characterization of Miss Adams as Jewish is more negative (for instance "the faint traces of Semitic ancestry" is rendered in Italian as "the unmistakable marks of her race"), to claim that the Italian translator took it upon himself to add these racist remarks is an inaccurate statement that risks overlooking the fact that the British society in which Christie wrote many of her early novels was a racist society and that anti-Semitism was not a sentiment exclusive to Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany, but rather a reality in most Western democracies at that time (Talbot, 2007).

While the attribution of those racist remarks might have been misplaced, Spurio's contribution has been seminal in bringing attention to the fact that the first translations of books in the Libri Gialli series were rarely complete, made significant changes to their source texts and, in spite of this, kept circulating for decades before new translations were issued. Moreover, comments on blogs, as well as this author's (2021) research on Sarego's translation of Christie's *Three Act Tragedy* do indeed indicate that Sarego operated significant changes to the source texts he worked on, changes that could either be the result of compliance to the dominant ideology or poetics of that time, or of the translator's personal stylistic preferences or agenda. Therefore, the following analysis of Sarego's *Un messaggio dagli spiriti* tries to answer the following questions: How much of the changes can be reasonably classified as necessary evil in the context of Fascist censorship? How much, instead, can be attributed to the norms of translation practice of that time and how much to the translator's own choices?

3 Perception and Representation of Gender Roles

Despite accusations of her being politically conservative, Christie has

9 The fact that Christie's works feature outdated or, at times, problematic views on race is a well-known fact, so much so that in 2023 several news outlets reported that HarperCollins would realease new editions of Christie's novels stripped of racist elements and offensive language.

been rediscovered for her representation of "diverse, dominant, swashbuckling and violently active" female characters (Makinen, 2006, p. 1). Christie enjoyed writing female characters that spanned the whole gamut of society, from housewives to adventuresses, from actresses to secretaries. In fact, it can be said that her heroines challenged traditional types of femininity.

On the other hand, in Fascist Italy the true calling for a woman was to be a mother and a wife, as the regime strove to increase birth rates and provide the country with a new generation of fascists (Dittrich-Johansen, 1995). The regime strongly opposed female emancipation and strove to preserve traditional female roles (De Grand, 1976) and promoted an image of women as "chaste, pure, virginal" (Macciocchi, 1979, p. 75). Conversely, men were expected to be virile and strong, with healthy sexual appetites; the Fascist ideal man was the patriarch of the family, whose superiority wives should recognize and respect (Willson, 2004). However, as famous characters borne out of Christie's pen like Hercule Poirot show, her male characters did not always conform to this traditional depiction of masculinity.

Did the potential incompatibility between Christie's portrayal of female and male characters and Fascist ideals influence Sarego's translation choices? This author's (2021) previous study on Sarego's translation of Christie's *Three Act Tragedy* reveals that several elements concerning female and male characters were omitted or altered either to avoid the risk of being censored or to conform to Fascist requirements.[10] Were similar strategies consistently employed by Sarego in other translations, as well? The next few sections will examine a few examples in which Sarego's translation offers a slightly different portrayal of female and male characters than the source text.

10 For example, Sarego eliminated a reference to homosexuality and an unmarried woman's allusion to her sexual affairs, but also had an older male character express his outright reproach for what he perceived as an inappropriate question asked by a young lady.

3.1 Gender Stereotypes

The main character in *The Sittaford Mystery* is a very self-reliant young woman, Emily Trefusis, who uses her smarts and resourcefulness to prove the innocence of her fiancé, whom she often criticizes for his lack of smarts and excessive reliance on others. Naturally, such an independent female character could have been problematic for the Fascist regime. Sarego mainly preserved Emily's characteristics, but still operated some changes that left the Italian audience with a slightly less formidable character than the one originally created by Christie.

During her investigation, Emily is always calm, calculating and level-headed. This trait is mostly preserved in Sarego's translation, which in a few instances features additional praise for Emily's intellectual prowess.[11] However, there are occurrences in which Sarego implements changes that diminish her qualities, such as in the passage presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Emily's Lawyer Tells Her There Are Developments in the Case

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"Please tell me," said Emily. Her voice was perfectly calm and composed. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– **Che c'è ancora di nuovo, Dio mio!** Mi dica, **mi dica tutto, non mi tenga sulle spine**… La voce di Emilia non ebbe un tremito; **soltanto il suo volto mutò un po' colore**. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 187)

While in Christie's text, Emily just utters three words and keeps her composure, in Sarego's version Emily's words betray great agitation, as she appears first to be scared to know what might have happened and then pleads with the lawyer to tell her everything. The next line in Sarego's translation stating that Emily's voice did not quiver appears to be completely out of place, as her words betray that her voice is all but

11 When Charles is explaining to Emily how he is going to describe her in his article about the murder, in the source text, he refers to her as a "high-spirited, beautiful girl," but in the translation Sarego also adds that Emily is "dotata di un'intelligenza assolutamente fuor del comune" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 155).

calm. The alteration to Emily's line displays an attempt at making the scene more dramatic which is completely at odds with Christie's original depiction. Sarego seemingly tried to salvage his translation by adding that, even though her tone of voice did not change, her complexion did. However, no reader of the Italian translation would perceive such a line as being pronounced calmly.

Later in the novel, Emily, who by now is really close to finding the solution to the murder, is at the victim's house looking for clues that might explain a pair of missing boots; the scene is a sort of inner monologue in which she tries to imagine what could have happened, if her fiancé did really kill his uncle or if someone else might have pinned the murder on him.

Table 2

Emily Reflects on the Case

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
If so — did that throw any light on the boot problem? Had someone been upstairs — perhaps in Captain Trevelyan's bedroom? Emily passed through the hall again. (Christie, 1931/2018)	Milla **si sentiva smarrire il cervello in quel guazzabuglio di ipotesi, di supposizioni, di dubbi che rimanevano insoddisfatti**. Uscì nell'atrio […] (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 260)

Table 2 presents the last two of a series of questions Emily asks herself to make sense of the circumstances; indeed, in the end, the missing boots represent the key to the solution to the mystery. Sarego omits Emily's questions and the mention of the boots, and substitutes them with an expression of her confusion and disorientation amidst all the hypotheses whirling in her head, something that is absent in Christie's source text. A few lines later, just before Emily finds the boots, the translation states that "[s]tanca e delusa, Emilia sedette nella poltroncina davanti al caminetto e se ne stette lì, con le mani in grembo a fissare la pietra bianca del focolare" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 261). This passage, which again depicts a discouraged and disheartened Emily, does not appear in the source text, where instead, Emily keeps searching every nook and nook and cranny until she finally finds the solution to the mystery. It is possible that Sarego was motivated by a desire to make the story

more gripping, to highlight the protagonist's struggle, rather than by a wish to tone down the capabilities of a female character who might have appeared too distant from the Fascist ideal of what a woman should be. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that these alterations betray the existence of a certain idea of woman in the translator's mind that did not completely align with the character that Christie was trying to portray.

The hypothesis that Sarego voluntarily added a tint of weakness to Emily's character because she is a woman seems to be supported by the choices he operated in the rendition of other female characters featured in the novel. While, overall, the way in which these characters are presented in the Italian version still echoes Christie's original characterization, it would be a great oversight to ignore the characteristics Sarego attributed to them. For instance, in Table 3 we see how in the source text a character's criticism of lower social classes becomes a comment on women in Sarego.

Table 3

Charles's Impression of Mrs Evans

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
He wondered just a little why Mrs Evans seemed so nervous, he put it down to the suspicious ignorance of her class. (Christie, 1931/2018)	Gli piaceva poco, invece, Rebecca, sempre reticente e scontrosa; ma ne attribuiva il contegno all'ignoranza e alla diffidenza, **naturali in una donnicciuola**. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 75)

While Christie's character is undoubtedly classist, in Sarego he becomes sexist as he attributes ignorance and diffidence to all women, whom he refers to as "donnicciuola," a pejorative that indicates disdain for women. Aside from being an inaccurate translation, it is a peculiar choice to have Charles utter it: He is Emily's main helper in the investigation and, throughout the novel, constantly expresses his admiration for her resourcefulness. For this reason, it does seem out of character that Charles would conflate all women together and label them so disparagingly.

A similarly negative comment on women can be found in a later pas-

sage, where Emily and Miss Willett, one of the residents in Sittaford, are discussing the latter's problem with servants.

Table 4

Considerations on Women Servants

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"[...] We are going to get two men instead — a house-parlorman and a kind of butler-chauffeur. I think it will answer much better." "Servants are silly, aren't they?" said Emily. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– [...] Fra un paio di giorni avremo, invece, due domestici… Uno si occuperà della cucina, l'altro farà il resto. E credo che, tutto sommato, andranno meglio. **Meno chiacchiere, meno pettegolezzi, dice la mamma**. – **Le ragazze** del popolo sono molto **paurose** e **superstiziose** — osservò Emilia. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 173)

While Emily is talking about "servants" in general, Sarego renders the term as "ragazze del popolo," thereby targeting the criticism towards women specifically. Then, he translates the adjective "silly" with the more specific "paurose" and "superstiziose." This judgment, despite being supported by the fact that in the source text, too, the servants are afraid to live in a house whose owner was murdered, is still more deprecatory. Moreover, in the source text Emily utters this remark in the form of a tag question, which makes it sound more like a passing comment, whereas in the target text it is an assertion.

The example reported in Table 4 also shows that Sarego added an appraisal of male servants as being less prone to gossip. This comment is nowhere to be found in the original and reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. Sarego's view of men as more level-headed is even more evident in the example reported in Table 5, which features an additional judgment on women presented as a compliment for men.

Table 5

Mrs Willett Considers Men Servants

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
Perhaps men servants would answer the case. That is what the Registry Office in Exeter advised. (Christie, 1931/2018)	Quasi quasi vorrei tentar la prova e prendere un cuoco e un cameriere al posto delle donne. **Gli uomini hanno meno grilli per la testa e si adattano più facilmente alla solitudine. Che cosa mi consiglia, signor ispettore**? (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 131)

The final sentence from the source text is removed and substituted with praise for men, who supposedly are more matter-of-fact and more capable of adapting to different situations. Additionally, Sarego has Mrs Willett ask for the Inspector's opinion, giving readers the impression that Mrs Willett esteems men more than she does women.

3.2 Marital Values

Having signed the Lateran Treaty in 1929, Mussolini's regime had officially "recogniz[ed] the Church's supremacy in regulating matters of matrimony and the family" (Saresella, 2017, p. 403). The Catholic Church could not assent to divorce since marriage was sacred; it also upheld the value of fidelity and considered extramarital relations as a shameful phenomenon (Dau Novelli, 2003). As such, the possibility of a woman's infidelity suggested in the anecdote reported in Table 6 could have been perceived as potentially problematic by the translator.

Table 6

Divorce and Infidelity

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"Oh, really," said the Nurse simpering, "you are too kind. But, of course, I have had curious experiences before this. Why, at the last case I attended — "Emily listened patiently to **a long and scandalous anecdote comprising complicated divorce and paternity questions**. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– Oh…, lei è molto gentile. Ma sapesse quante ne ho viste, nell'esercizio della mia professione. Pensi che in una famiglia dove fui per un anno intero…— e qui Milla dovette sorbirsi, con santa pazienza, il racconto di ogni sorta di guai passati dall'infermiera [...] (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 192)

Sarego might have decided not to include this anecdote since it is not necessary for the progression of the plot and adopts the same strategy in a later passage where a similar incident is mentioned. It is highly unlikely that these references to extramarital affairs would have elicited an actual response from the Church or the regime, all the more since they are only mentioned in passing and the affairs are not actually depicted.[12] Therefore, Sarego's choice to omit these references could either be an indication of over-zealousness or, plausibly, of the translator's personal beliefs, as passages dealing with similar issues in his translation of *Three Act Tragedy* were handled in a similar way.

Interestingly, however, Sarego's translation of *The Sittaford Myster* still features passages that refer to infidelity. These passages are mostly centered around one specific character, Martin Dering, the husband of the victim's niece. A relatively famous writer, Martin Dering is a known philanderer, a fact which is mentioned several times in the source text. Considering the strategy adopted by Sarego in the aforementioned lines about divorce and uncertain paternity, we would expect references to Martin Dering's infidelity to be removed, too. Instead, not only does Sarego not omit them, but he adds even more details about Dering's infidelity.

12 It is interesting to note that in the Mondadori publishing house different standards of "decency" were employed according to the series in which a translation would appear. For instance, George Simenon's works were not deemed a good fit for "Libri Gialli" because they often featured an erotic element (Albonetti, 1994, p. 68). At the same time, for other series, Mondadori urged his collaborators to "puntare sul rosso," that is, to translate novels that were more risqué (Albonetti, 1994).

Table 7

Martin Dering's Infidelity

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
He's an ideal person for a murderer — always getting telegrams from bookmakers and losing money on horses. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– È un tipaccio… **sempre attorno alle gonnelle**; perde quattrini alle corse… **Quella povera Silvia deve mandar giù certi bocconi amari**! (Christie, 1931/1935, pp. 177–178)
"You know — about the speeches, and what asses so and so, a famous novelist and a famous playwright, were. And he said he had been rottenly placed at the dinner. There was an empty seat on one side of him where the **sex specialist**, Martin Dering, ought to have been, but he moved up near to a poet, who is very well known in Blackheath, and tried to make the best of things." (Christie, 1931/2018)	[…] si dilungò a raccontarmi, con uno stile un po' sbrigliato, i pettegolezzi raccolti a tavola, conditi da salaci commenti sui commensali. **Malignava, fra l'altro, sul conto di una ben nota romanziera assai brillante, il cui posto era rimasto vuoto, accanto a quello che avrebbe dovuto occupare appunto il nostro Martino Dering che notoriamente le fa la corte**. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 178)

In the first instance presented in Table 7, Emily is explaining why she thinks that Martin Dering could have murdered Captain Trevelyan: Being addicted to betting, he would have desperately needed the money his wife would have inherited from her uncle. The source text does not mention his having extramarital affairs; but the target text does. The second example, instead, shows how the target text not only states that Martin Dering was courting another woman, but also hints at the fact that he and that woman might have been together on a night in which he was supposed to be at a writers' dinner. This is a case of complete rewriting, as the source text gives completely different information.

Why did Sarego adopt opposing strategies in dealing with infidelity? It is possible that mention of this sensitive topic was omitted from the example reported in Table 6 because it does not involve any of the central characters, while Martin Dering has a more prominent role. At the same time, the different treatment reserved to Dering's infidelity might be attributable to the fact that he is a man, whose sexual appetite would

not have been condemned by the regime, whereas the characters whose infidelity Sarego chose to omit were all women.

The different stance adopted by Sarego with female and male characters is also exemplified by his portrayal of Miss Perchouse, one of the inhabitants of Sittaford, which reveals Sarego's views on unmarried women. Miss Percehouse is very quick-witted, inquisitive and, most importantly, unmarried. In Fascist Italy, women were expected to serve their homeland by being wives and mothers; therefore, celibacy was seen as a disservice to society and celibate women were publicly derogated (De Grazia, 1992).[13]

Sarego often refers to Miss Percehouse with the term "zitella," which had (and still has) a markedly negative connotation. While the derogatory term "spinster" is only used once in the source text when the character is first introduced, in Sarego's translation the word "zitella" appears on several occasions either to translate other words Christie might have used to refer to Miss Percehouse, such as "old maid," or as an addition not prompted by any element in the source text.[14] Additionally, there are several occurrences in which Miss Percehouse is depicted in a more negative light in the translation than she is in the source text. For instance, Sarego adds comments about her voice sounding "un po' falsa" or comments that her voice "era salita di tono fino a diventare insopportabile" (Christie, 1931/1935, pp. 159, 164), whereas no such comment can be found in the source text. On a couple of occasions, her way of speaking to her nephew is also crueler in the translation; vice versa, the nephew's complaints about his aunt become exaggerated.

Despite being clearly painted as a gossip, Miss Percehouse is all but a ridiculous or miserable character in the source text. Clever and quite well-off, she is proof that women did not need a husband to live a good life. The aggravation of Miss Percehouse's flaws indicates that Sarego

13 This was only true for women. Celibacy was acceptable for men "because it testified to filial devotion to mothers as well as to mothers' dedication to their aging, if emotionally and materially dependent, sons" (De Grazia, 1992, p. 70).

14 In his translation of *Three Act Tragedy*, Sarego also employed the term "zitella" to refer to two female characters throughout the novel, despite the fact that Christie never used the term "spinster" to refer to either of them (Sfriso, 2021).

could have been trying to portray her as undesirable because a positive portrayal of an unmarried woman surely did not conform to the negative image of "spinster" the regime was hoping to propagate. At the same time, the fact that Sarego used the same strategy in at least two different translations strongly suggests that he shared the regime's stance on celibate women.

3.3 Physical Appearance

Beside altering the women's character, Sarego's translation also presents additions that suggest his support of the Fascist ideal of feminine beauty. Since the function of a "real" woman was to bear children, the Fascist ideal abhorred thinness and promoted full-figured women, as thin women were considered less fit to procreate. The images of skinny girls that were enjoying so much popularity abroad, were strongly opposed by regime officials, who actually warned newspapers and magazines against publishing and popularizing images of thin women (Talbot 2007).

Miss Willett is quite a thin girl whom we first meet in the first few pages of the books through Major Burnaby's eyes, who comments negatively on her scrawniness.

Table 8

Major Burnaby's Comments on Miss Willett's Appearance

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
Pretty girl — scraggy, of course — they all were nowadays. What was the good of a woman if she didn't look like a woman? Papers said curves were coming back. About time too. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– Carina, la ragazza! [...] Ma, santo cielo, **non ha un filo di carne addosso! Sembra proprio uno stuzzicadenti**! **Bel gusto**! Perdere ogni parvenza di donna! Ah! Ai miei tempi!... Hanno un bel dire, i giornali, che le curve ritornano di moda… **prima che si possano rimpolpare quegli ossicini, ha tempo di far i denti lunghi, la signorina**! (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 14)

Major Burnaby's disapproval of the girl's thinness is evident in the source text, as he expresses his wish that being curvier would come back in fashion and women would start to look like women again. In the target text, Sarego magnifies the Major's distaste for her thinness by comparing the girl to a toothpick and highlighting the fact that she will need a lot of time to put on some weight. Sarego also questions the taste of people who like that sort of physique ("Bel gusto!"), resulting overall significantly more critical than the source text. Miss Willett's thinness is brought up again a few other times in the translation, despite not being mentioned in the source text.

Sarego's views on the ideal physical appearance, however, are not limited to women. In fact, in his translation men are more vividly characterized as robust and strong. Their physical prowess is also stressed. For instance, Sarego claims that Ronnie is "forte come un toro" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 17), describes Charles Enderby as a "ragazzone" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 72), and Brian Pearson as "una specie di gigante, dotato di muscoli d'acciaio" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 216). Sarego also particularly stresses Major Burnaby and Captain Trevelyan's athleticism and ability in a variety of sports.

Conversely, men who do not have strong features are labeled as effeminate, as is the case with Professor Rycroft, or Jim Pearson, Emily's fiancé.

Table 9

Jim Pearson's Appearance

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
He was good-looking, indeed handsome, if you took no account of the rather weak mouth and the irresolute slant of the eyes. (Christie, 1931/2018)	Aveva una bella figura, alta, slanciata e un viso regolare che si sarebbe detto impeccabile senza la linea troppo molle della bocca, **quasi femminea**, **e una certa irresolutezza nello sguardo che gli dava un'espressione di timidezza esagerata e tutt'altro che virile**. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 91)

Despite not being characterized as effeminate in the source text, the longer description provided by Sarego alludes to his being feminine and not looking virile. Sarego's description of Jim's appearance seems to echo the Fascist regime's worry about the "weakening of masculinity": as one of the only two male characters presented as living in a big city, he was one of those men that the regime thought were being perverted by "the scum of urbanism and sedentary life," a "reflexive, hypersensitive and frail man whose passive and uncertain character derived from an excess of rationality" and by his desire for "the domestic comforts of modern civilization" (Bellassai, 2005, pp. 316, 320, 323). Jim is incapable of defending himself from the accusations of having murdered his uncle and has to rely on his fiancée Emily to clear his name. Emily in fact mentions that his weakness might be one of the reasons why she likes him, as she feels he would let her lead him in his life. A male character such as Jim surely did not showcase the characteristics of a strong Fascist man and that might be why Sarego did not alter his description to highlight his manliness as he did with other characters.

Having discussed the strategies adopted by Sarego to portray female and male characters, it is also worth discussing how he handled a variety of other topics that might have been considered quite sensitive at the time in which the translation was published.

4 Handling Sensitive Issues

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, when faced with issues that the regime could have perceived as inappropriate, offensive or taboo, publishing houses usually resorted to self-censorship in order to eliminate from their translations all the risky elements that might have exposed them to being censored. More often than not, they tended to be quite overzealous in their attempts not to cross the regime.

When thinking about self-censorship, the first strategy to come to mind might be omission. Considering the approach adopted by Sarego in altering female and male characters to fit an image that was quite different

from the one championed by Christie, we can expect that he employed strategies other than omission to handle sensitive issues such as references to the war, occultism and race.

4.1 War

At the time of the Fascist regime, defeatism, pacifism and anti-war sentiment were considered taboo topics. References to these issues were handled with great care by publishers, as patently anti-Fascist views would in all probability incur into censorship.[15]

In *The Sittaford Mystery*, the specter of war is most evidently present through the character of Robert Gardner, a man whose turn in World War I left him with a disability that, as the text suggests, could have been cured if the family had been provided with funds for medical care. Christie's decision to insert such a character in the novel is testimony of the fact that she was "intimately engaged with the local effects of shifting social changes brought about by global conflict" (Martin and West, 2019, p. 12). Since "[t]he war acted above all as a grand founding myth of the new fascist man" (Bellassai, 2005, p. 317), the reminder of its disastrous effects on veterans were an element that the regime might have wished to omit.

While Gardner's character is not altered, Sarego's sensitivity towards this topic is displayed by other choices he operated. For example, asked to stake out a house in the middle of the night in the cold winter, Charles Enderby complains about the cold and jokingly belittles the strenuous experience of the first world war by saying: "What did you do in the Great War, Daddy, can't have been any worse than this" (Christie, 1931/2018). Charles's words are a direct quote from a British First World War recruitment poster from 1915 by Savile Lumley: Depicting a future when the Great War had already ended, the poster shows a daughter asking her father about his contribution in the War and patently tries

15 Several Reader's reports from Mondadori's archives mention the need to purge books of their authors' views on war; see for example the report about Adrienne Thomas's *Die Katrin wird Soldat* or Vicki Baum's *Marion lebt.* in Albonetti (1994).

to induce feelings of guilt in men who had not enlisted (Bownes and Fleming, 2014). It is unclear whether Sarego knew of the poster and of Charles's sentence being a direct quote of it, but he omits the comment and substitutes it with a simple exclamation about the cold ("Son diventato un pezzo di ghiaccio!"; Christie, 1931/1935, p. 214). Even though the source text mentions war only fleetingly, eliminating the humorous comment about the war effort would have been a much safer alternative to avoid the risk of being censored.[16]

However, it cannot be excluded that the decision to omit the comment might also be at least in part a reflection of the translator's personal beliefs. This second possibility is suggested by the strategy adopted by Sarego in another passage that refers to the War. Here Robert Gardner expresses his belief that his nephew's time in prison will do him some good.

Table 10

Robert Gardner's Comments on Young People

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"Teach him life can't be all beer and skittles," **said Robert Gardner maliciously**. "**Too young to fight in the Great War, wasn't he?** Able to live soft and take it easily. Well, well... He got it in the neck from another source." (Christie, 1931/2018)	– Già. Gl'insegnerà a stare al mondo. Oh, **i giovani del giorno d'oggi, che non hanno fatto la guerra, non possono dire di conoscere la vita.** Sport, balli, tabarins, teatri, cinematografi… Sì, Sì! **Provi un pochino anche lui le tribolazioni**… **gli farà bene**… purché riesca a cavarsela, naturalmente! (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 243)

First, the narrator's comment on Robert Gardner speaking "maliciously", which might elicit in readers a certain dislike for Gardner's char-

16 Sarego employs the same strategy to deal with a humorous comment on suicide. Suicide was condemned by both the Church and the regime, which saw it as a symptom of weakness and an act against morality: As such, suicides were not allowed in the news or in movies and, often, in novels (Barrale, 2015). Publishing houses, however, handled suicides on a case-to-case basis. Naturally, stories that legitimated suicide or put too much focus on this issue were deemed unacceptable. When possible, suicides were substituted with some kind of accident, illness or a departure of the character (see for instance Lavinia Mazzucchetti's report on Joe Lederer's *Blatt im Winde* and Victoria Wolf's *Eine Frau hat Mut* in Albonetti, 1994). There were also instances in which a suicide was characterized negatively enough in the source text as to make it possible to retain it in the translation (Barrale, 2015).

acter, is omitted in the target text, so that the reader of the target text is rather led to take his words in earnest. Moreover, the target text extends Gardner's disparagement from his nephew to all the young people of that time, making his speech sound more like a condemnation of a generation, rather than of a single person. This passage did not need altering to appease censors as it already criticized those who did not fight in the war. Instead, it betrays a conscious choice made by the translator to convey a specific message to his audience.

4.2 The Occult

The incident that triggers the novel's event is an initially playful séance, during which it is announced that someone, Captain Trevelyan, will be murdered. The séance being fundamental to the progression of the plot, it was not eliminated in the translation. However, during the investigation, Sarego has the police Inspector working on the case convey a distinctly negative opinion on that sort of activity.

Table 11

Inspector Narracott's View on Occultism

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
The inspector shook his head. The table turning had been his red herring. (Christie, 1931/2018)	L'ispettore crollò il capo **con aria poco persuasa**. **Non aveva mai preso sul serio tutto ciò che odorava di "stregoneria" — così chiamava, tutte in un fascio, le cosiddette "scienze occulte" — e i messaggi, le "materializzazioni medianiche" erano sempre per lui dei semplici trucchi, più o meno indovinati, buoni soltanto per darla a bere ai gonzi o per dar guadagno ai ciarlatani.** (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 128)

In the source text, the Inspector merely recognizes the séance as an artifice meant to mislead the investigation. On the other hand, the target text presents additional judgments on "table turning" and other occult sciences, possibly with the goal of convincing readers that such prac-

tices are nothing but a fraud and to warn them against such practices. Although by the end of the novel, it is revealed that indeed nothing supernatural took place during the séance, the decision to make these additions to the target text suggests that the translator wished to make his stance on this matter clear.

While Nazi Germany did harbor an interest for the occult, in Fascist Italy occult groups and esotericism were kept under control, undoubtedly also as a consequence of the Fascist regime's closeness with the Catholic Church, which did not look kindly at them (Staudenmaier, 2010, p. 417). Therefore, Sarego's addition was probably motivated by a desire to avoid condemnation or censure. It was likely for a similar reason that another passage referring to a form of superstition was also eliminated. The source text mentions that, near the village where the story takes place, there is a supposedly beautiful cave that is extremely hard to locate and states: "if you find it be sure to leave a pin inside it for luck" (Christie, 1931/2018). This superstitious behavior is omitted in the target text, which instead says: "se lei ha la fortuna di trovarla, vedrà che non le ho raccontato delle storie" (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 154). The omission suggests Sarego's attempt to distance himself from this sort of belief.

4.3 Considerations on Race

While not being as foregrounded as in Nazi Germany, "racism was demonstrably implicit in the Fascist world-view" (Talbot, 2007, p. 117). The belief in white superiority became stronger after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the inferiority of black people was seen as a biological truth. The tightening of the ties with Germany and the promulgation of racial laws in 1938 then led to an extremization of these views.

Christie's novels often feature characters from "exotic" countries, such as the Middle East or the British colonies and at times express views that would doubtlessly be considered racist nowadays. Rowland (2000) argues that, while the racism in Christie is indeed present, it is in fact a byproduct of her time and does not actually mirror Christie's stand-

point. Instead, she posits that her characters' opinions on the "Other" are often employed to criticize the model of Englishness they represent. At the same time, however, the "exotic" people presented in her novels are mostly servants who become "an extension of the place they represent" (Sarnelli, 2019, p. 130) and whose descriptions at times reinforce stereotypes about the lands they come from.

The Sittaford Mystery features one character from the British colonies, Abdul, the Indian servant of Captain Wyatt. He is kept very much in the background of the novel and he becomes a tool for Christie to show the racism and bigotism of some of the characters at Sittaford. Despite the fact that he appears only a handful of times in the story, Sarego paid special attention to Abdul's portrayal, as the following examples demonstrate.

Table 12

Abdul Is Introduced

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"That's the best of having a native servant," said Captain Wyatt. "They understand orders. Abdul," he roared. A tall Indian in a turban came out of the cottage and waited attentively. (Christie, 1931/2018)	– Ho anche la fortuna di avere un servo indiano – ripigliò l'invalido; – così **non c'è pericolo che faccia comunella con questa gente**. Abdul! – ringhiò. Un indiano **autentico**, **con tanto di** turbante in testa, sbucò di corsa dal villino e si mise dinnanzi al capitano, sull'attenti. (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 168)

As we can see, the source text suggests that Abdul's ability to follow orders is a natural consequence of being "native"; in Sarego, this statement is altered so that Abdul's worth is related to the fact that, being native, he will never have the chance to create relationships with the other inhabitants of Sittaford, and will be forced to stay loyal to his master. The comment made by Captain Wyatt in the source text is undoubtedly racist, but Sarego highlights another aspect of what it meant to belong to a racial minority at that time, that is, segregation. Moreover, Sarego's translation stresses how exotic Abdul looks, by pointing out that he is an authentic Indian, complete with a turban on his head. Abdul's

appearance does not evoke the same sense of exoticism in Christie, possibly because British readers were quite familiar with Indian characters because of their colonies; on the other hand, an Italian audience might have found it more amusing.

Towards the end of the novel, Ronnie and Mr Rycroft are walking in front of Captain Wyatt's house and see Abdul. Once again, Sarego alters some parts of the source text so that the target text communicates a different image of him.

Table 13

The Villagers' Opinions About Abdul

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"Good afternoon, Abdul," said Mr Rycroft. "How's your master?" The native shook his head. "Master bad today, Sahib. Not see anyone. Not see anyone for long time." "You know," said Ronnie as they passed on, "that chap could murder Wyatt quite easily and no one would know. He could go on for weeks shaking his head and saying the master wouldn't see anyone and no one would think it the least odd." (Christie, 1931/2018)	– Buon giorno, Abdul – fece il professore. – Come sta il tuo padrone? – Mio padrone molto male, Sahib. Vedere nessuno. Vedere nessuno molto tempo – rispose il servo crollando il capo **in un certo suo modo singolarmente espressivo**. – **Non mi piace quell'individuo** – commentò Ronnie a bassa voce, mentre si allontanavano. – Un bel giorno **gli salta il ticchio** di far la testa al suo padrone e nessuno ne saprebbe niente. **Chi avrebbe il coraggio di entrare in casa quando egli crolla il capo in quella maniera** e dice che il suo padrone non vuol veder nessuno? (Christie, 1931/1935, pp. 266–267)

First, Sarego characterizes Abdul's way of shaking his head as peculiar to himself, while no such distinction is made by Christie. Then, in the source text, Ronnie's comment on the possibility that Abdul might, one day, kill his master seem to be facetious and does not indicate a true dislike of Abdul on Ronnie's part. On the other hand, in Sarego's version, Ronnie openly states that he does not like Abdul and implies that he has a threatening countenance by stating that people would not dare enter

the house. The fear of the non-Western foreigner is considerably more marked in Sarego's translation.

There are several other occasions where Sarego significantly altered the way in which Italian readers would perceive Abdul, but only a final example will be provided. Table 14 presents a conversation between Emily and Charles, who are discussing the possibility that it was Abdul who killed Captain Trevelyan. A quick glance is sufficient to see that Sarego supplemented the source text with many additional details.

Table 14

Abdul as a Potential Culprit

The Sittaford Mystery	*Un messaggio dagli spiriti*
"Of course," said Emily, "the person it ought to be is Abdul. It would be in a book. He'd be a Lascar really, and Captain Trevelyan would have thrown his favorite brother overboard in a mutiny – something like that." "I decline to believe," said Charles, "that that wretched depressed-looking native ever murdered anybody." (Christie, 1931/2018)	– E che ne dice di Abdul, allora, il servo indiano del nostro Capitan Fracassa? Stia a sentire: una pagina da romanzo d'avventure. Trevelyan, in una delle sue partite di caccia nel cuore dell'India, gli uccide… che so… il padre, mettiamo, o un fratello… oppure gli ruba la sua donna. Abdul, manco a dirlo, gli giura vendetta! — Mi segue? — S'ingaggia in qualità di servo col capitano Wyatt, viene in Inghilterra e si ferma quassù senza mai perdere di vista la sua vittima designata. Giunto il momento… zac, gli fa la festa. Che ne dice? – Terribilmente drammatico, non fo per dire; e anche molto verosimile… però io non ci credo. Povero diavolo! Ma non vede che fa fatica a stare in piedi, quel disgraziato! Sa a chi mi fa pensare? A uno dei vecchi leoni spelacchiati dei serragli di terz'ordine, mezzi morti di fame, che tremano alla sola vista del domatore. No, no, cara Milla; se proprio non sa trovar di meglio… (Christie, 1931/1935, p. 248)

Sarego expands on the premise of the source text by making Emily's hypothesis on why Abdul might have murdered the captain more dra-

matic: In the target text, Emily suggests at least three potential reasons for revenge and explains the plan of the native to get his revenge in great detail. The way in which Charles reacts to her suggestions is also worth mentioning. In the target text, Charles suggests that Emily's explanation sounds quite probable, thus implying that "natives" are vindictive people; however, he does not believe it because Abdul looks too frail. He then compares Abdul to an exotic animal in a cage, a comparison which is quite problematic because it suggests that Abdul is less than a person, he is something exotic that can be gazed at and that does not flourish because he does not belong.

Even though these alterations could be interpreted as an expression of Sarego's penchant for exaggerating elements of the source text or dramatizing it, a phenomenon that was observed in his translation of *Three Act Tragedy* (Sfriso, 2021), they are also the embodiment of a racist attitude towards people of color. The source text did not express any sentiment that countered the regime's own views on colonized people and Sarego's exacerbation of Christie's already racist comments cannot but be read as an expression of his own views.

5 Conclusion

Examining Sarego's translation of *The Sittaford Mystery* produced under the Fascist regime, it becomes evident that attributing alterations solely to the regime's dictates would be an oversimplification of the narrative. Contrary to what is traditionally assumed with regard to Fascist-era translations, many of the modifications made by Sarego were not mere concessions to avoid censorship, but could be interpreted, to a greater or lesser degree, as a conscious expression of Sarego's own set of beliefs. The shifts in the portrayal of female characters, while seemingly minor, unquestionably alter Christie's portrayal of these characters and, at times, veer towards deprecation of women. Even in instances necessitating adjustments to circumvent censorhip, Sarego often opted not merely for omission, as was customary during that period, but actively introduced perspectives aligned with Fascist ideals, show-

casing an eagerness to conform rather than reluctant compliance. These findings underscore the crucial role of translators as active agents in shaping literary representations within highly charged ideological environments, a role that is often overlooked in favor of a narrative depicting translators as more passive participants.

If Sarego's translations were to be held up to today's standards, where the norms that govern translation practice can be said to have shifted towards the pole of adequacy and away from that of acceptability (to use Toury's terms), they would likely be deemed deficient due to their incompleteness and the numerous alterations to the original texts. However, it is important to remember that Sarego's deviations from the source text were also a symptom of the prevailing translation practice of that time, which placed more emphasis on a translation's acceptability in the target culture than on its adherence to the source text. To freely, and at times invasively, alter texts was common practice.

Furthermore, contemporary societal changes also prompt a reassessment of the choices made by Fascist-era translators. Recent years have seen heightened concerns about diversity, inclusivity and sensitivity, particularly in Western countries, concerns that have problematized views and ideas that just a few years ago were not considered problematic. These changes have had such an impact on our society that several publishers chose to edit works by authors like Roald Dahl or Ian Fleming to remove offensive, sexist, or racist content, thus likely influencing their translations into other languages. Modern translators, whether rendering works from a different era or cultural context, can face dilemmas akin to those faced by Sarego: Confronted with language or ideas that may be problematic in the recipient culture, translators must decide whether to retain those elements and maintain fidelity to the source text, with the risk of being accused of cultural insensitivity, omit or alter them so as to align the text with the sensibilities of their target readership, or employ warnings to alert readers to potentially controversial themes.

Translations, like all cultural products, are heavily shaped by the so-

ciohistorical context in which they are produced and are imbued with the beliefs of their time. Rather than solely critiquing them for their deficiencies, they should be regarded as valuable resources for gaining insight into the intricate dynamics of navigating political, stylistic, and social pressures in a specific era. They illustrate how translation choices can subtly uphold or challenge prevailing ideologies and poetics, offering translators a platform to assert their agency while negotiating with diverse cultural and political forces. By examining the interplay of ideology, dominant translation practice and translator agency in Sarego's translation of *The Sittaford Mystery*, this contribution hopes to have challenged the assumptions that are usually made with regard to translations produced under the Fascist regime and to have demonstrated that further analysis is needed to accurately appreciate the contributions of translators during that period.

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