"The usual hubbub of accents": Italian Films, Transnational Distribution and the Reception of English-language Dubbing in the UK (1949-1969)

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Abstract
From the late 1940s onwards an increasing number of Italian and Italian majority co-production films reached the UK in an English-language version. These films belonged to different genres (e.g., historical epics, crime melodramas, mythological films, westerns) and were marketed to diverse audiences of mainstream and art-house cinemas across the country. Historical findings reveal that one of the main causes of dissatisfaction for British film critics reviewing these films was the confusing array of accents and varieties of English used. This study argues that the existence of multiple varieties of English is the result of significant re-alignments in the international film trade which took place during the 1950s and 60s. As a result, Italian films were dubbed either in London, Rome or New York, relying on the local availability and experience of translators, adapters, voice talents and direction. This study argues that the so-called "usual hubbub of accents" was the result of the complex transnational identity of Italian films produced during this period, but also ensued from the powerful control exercised by American producers and distributors over casting, localisation, and marketing decisions. Historical research into the reception of dubbed Italian films in the UK allows us to understand not only the material and cultural circumstances contributing to the unpopularity of dubbing, but also subsequent developments in the localisation and exhibition of non-English-language films in this country.

Key-words: dubbing, reception, Italian cinema, varieties of English, historical research.

1. Introduction: Reviewing Dubbing

In January 1964, a regular reviewer of Italian films (John Gillet, signed J. G.) for the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin* (*MFB*) ended his largely positive review of *Il Gattopardo* (*The*

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Leopard, Visconti, 1963) with a short note of disappointment. The critic objected:

> The English/American dubbing is acceptable when the players use their own voices (Lancaster and Leslie French), but there are [sic] the usual hubbub of accents among the smaller parts, and the voice perspectives are often ill-chosen. It is deplorable that a film of this calibre cannot be shown in the way its director ordered. (Gillet 1964: 4)

The critic was probably referencing the controversial mis-handling of this Italo-French co-production by distributor 20th Century-Fox when released for the Anglophone market. Luchino Visconti was very unhappy with the way the American distributors had transformed *The Leopard*, through unauthorised editing work which substantially altered the film's length and colour appearance (Visconti 1963: 9).

Gillet's objections to the dubbing of *The Leopard* come under two headings, which typified how Italian films circulated and were received in the UK in the 1950s and 60s. The first harks back to the long-lived line of critical thought which considers the physical and aural correspondence between the body of the actor and their own voice as the only "acceptable" solution for films of artistic "calibre"[1]. To the educated film critic, the practice of post-synchronisation, or dubbing, would have only been tolerable if actors were looping themselves, that is to say, they re-recorded their own voice (presumably intra-lingually) in a sound recording studio after shooting had taken place. Recent scholarship has convincingly exposed the complexities of on-screen verbal and vocal expression and untangled the "inherently split" nature of this phenomenon (Dwyer and O'Meara 2020: 154) in its various film and media contexts. As this article argues, the correspondence between actors' bodies and voices sought by Gillet would have been hugely problematic not only for *The Leopard* but for many other films produced in Italy during the 1950s and 60s which are referenced in the following sections.

[1] Vigorous positions against dubbing were expressed at the time including *The Observer*'s film columnist Caroline Lejeune, and the filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni.

A second, related aspect of Gillet's review is the focus on multiple varieties of English on screen, here exemplified by the dubbed version of *The Leopard* seen by UK moviegoers, prepared by 20th Century-Fox in New York (Archer 1963: 107). As highlighted in the review, whereas Burt Lancaster and Leslie French had looped themselves, with their mid-Atlantic English and Received Pronunciation (RP) respectively (Crowther 1963: 25), the rest of the cast in minor roles spoke a variety of other accents. This confusing acoustic dimension was, according to the critic, neither an exception nor an isolated case: the co-existence of different accents was "usual".

Gillet's review is a typical critical response to the complications and compromises inherent in international film distribution, and shows how film distributors struggled to find solutions which would allow films to be accepted on their own merits in the target market. In order to investigate the "metamorphosis", as Marcarini described it (2001: 4-5), that Italian and all foreign-language films had to undergo to be understood and appreciated by a diverse English-speaking spectatorship, I take a transnational approach which considers dubbing beyond the limits of fixed national boundaries (Higbee and Lim 2010; Lim 2019). Looking at film dubbing in the UK, I argue, gives us a better understanding of the material and cultural circumstances of transnational film production and co-production, and to contextualise subsequent developments in the market for foreign-language films and in the language localisation industry in the UK. In section two, I discuss methodological challenges raised by these transnational contexts of dubbing.

In sections three and four, I survey reviews from a variety of periodicals complaining about confusing, inadequate, or implausible accents and vocal performances in dubbed Italian films of the 1950s and 60s. By looking closely at some of the most illustrative reviews alongside the English versions available for study, I argue that the existence of multiple varieties of English on-screen, including British English, American English, and Italian-accented English demonstrates two interlocking challenges faced by the dubbing industry at that time. The first, stylistic challenge relates to matters of voice casting and direction, especially the perception that voices were ill-chosen; the second, logistical challenge, which led "smaller parts" to have confusing accents, resulted from a revoicing operation which had to rely on the local availability and experience of sound

technicians, translators, adapters, voice talent and direction. I highlight how multiple varieties of English in dubbed Italian films are therefore intricately connected to the city locations of dubbing studios based in London, Rome and New York, and by the fast expanding and US-controlled market for Italian films, which shaped their transnational distribution and UK reception. While ranging widely over the Italian film production output distributed in the UK, particular attention will be given in these sections to *Persiane Chiuse* (*Behind Closed Shutters*, Comencini, 1951) prepared in London by Molly Stevens and Major William De Lane Lea, and the Italo-French co-production of *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*, De Sica, 1961), starring Sophia Loren, which was given a double-version release (subtitled and dubbed).

2. Methodology: Film Versions, Production and Sources

A systematic historical investigation of dubbing was developed to negotiate three key methodological challenges. First, there was the question of how to identify the main or the original language of films produced in Italy at the time. Italian films in the 1950s and 60s were often co-produced with France and/or the United States, as well as with other European countries, where Italy provided the majority of production costs and most of the actors and technicians (Marcarini 2001: 3). The Italian nationality of a film was indicated by the so called *certificato di nazionalità*, a sort of identity passport for films issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Performing Arts in the pre-production stage. Registering films as Italian made sense from a financial and administrative point of view as producers were then able to obtain state subsidy (Fadda and Noto 2020: 47). The "Italian-ness" of these films, however, is not so obvious or clear-cut from a performative, linguistic and transnational point of view. As Wagstaff argued, this regulatory system "had the paradoxical effect of internationalising Italian cinema" (1998: 75).

Cases such as *The Leopard* exemplify this tendency. Adapted from a canonical Italian-language source (the homonymous Sicilian novel *Il Gattopardo* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa) and set against the backdrop of a formative period in Italy's history (the *Risorgimento*), Visconti's adaptation was written by a team of Italian-born screenwriters including Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Pasquale

Festa Campanile. However, the languages spoken on set were not only Italian, but also English and French (*The Times* 1962: 7). When it came to assigning main roles, producers and distributors opted for New Yorker Burt Lancaster (Don Fabrizio), Tunisian-born Claudia Cardinale (Angelica), and Parisian Alain Delon (Tancredi), none of whom spoke Italian as their first language.

Language advisors, translators and interpreters collaborated to draft versions of the script before, during and after shooting. For example, Archibald Colquhoun, translator into English of Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel, was employed in this production as English dialogue adviser and translator to Visconti (Davies 1964: 99). From this perspective, one could arguably say that there never was an *original* Italian-language film version of *The Leopard*. The Italian version itself was also dubbed. As was customary in Italy, sound and speech were not recorded directly. The majority of actors on set were given a standard Italian pronunciation by professional voice actors, whereas others, such as Lancaster, were given a more or less prominent Sicilian accent in the Italian version, Cavalier Chevalley, the Northern Italian character in the story, had a Piedmontese accent. He was played in the English dub by British actor Leslie French.

The multilingualism of Italian co-productions of the 1950s and 60s presents a methodological challenge in that it makes it impossible to assign, say, a source language or a target language for the purposes of comparison. It also, however, offers an opportunity to highlight the ways in which language diversity impacts the production and distribution of films, between Italy and the UK but also in a transnational perspective, allowing screen and AVT scholars to draw connections between and across national and language markets. It also serves to expand present knowledge of film translation practices and traditions in Italy and in the English-speaking world.

A third methodological consideration is the scarce archival and commercial availability of film prints in the various language versions produced over time, a crucial point raised by O'Sullivan and Cornu (2018; 2019). Rigorous enquiry is significantly affected by the limited availability of primary sources, especially when the goal is to carry out comparative textual analyses to triangulate and verify conflicting press accounts. To overcome this methodological

challenge, I sought out a range of language versions from a very large corpus of Italian films distributed in Italy, the United States and the UK between the end of World War Two and the 1970s, verifying their availability in archival and commercial film repositories and platforms.

This study focuses on a twenty year period, 1949-1969, which illustrates the diversity of Italian films dubbed for the UK market, from the first known post-war example of dubbing of an Italian film, *Don Bosco* (*St John Bosco,* Alessandrini, 1935), a historical biopic of the Roman Catholic priest Giovanni Bosco which reached the UK in 1949 through a religious organisation, to Federico Fellini's fantasy drama *Satyricon* (*Fellini Satyricon*, Fellini, 1969), loosely based on the homonymous satirical novel by Petronius, which was released in the UK by United Artists in a dubbed version.

To investigate the reception of dubbed Italian films in the UK, several interlinked factors were weighed, including the genre of non-English language films that were distributed (Wagstaff 1995, 1998; Marcarini 2001; Lembach 2003; Mazdon and Wheatley 2013) and their market (Dickinson and Street 1985; Eyles and Skone 1991; Jones 2015; 2017). Scarcity of box office figures and oral history records, however, means that audience composition and viewing preferences are far from clear (Thissen and Zimmerman 2016). Industry commentary published in trade periodicals such as *The Daily Cinema* and *The Daily Film Renter*, and critical discourse emerging from the *MFB*, *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Sight and Sound* are still the main source of reception data for this study, even if they do represent only selective viewpoints. Popular film magazines such as *Picturegoer* and newspapers such as *The Observer*, which featured film fans' letters and comments on published editorials and reviews, will also help to provide an alternative perspective to professional or high-brow criticism.

3. "A tight-lipped heroine from Kensington": Dubbing in London

In the late 1940s only a limited number of Italian films circulated in the UK (Wagstaff 1998: 80; Marcarini 2001: 6). These were mainly Neorealist titles (*Roma città aperta/Rome Open City*, Rossellini, 1945; *Sciuscià/Shoeshine*, De Sica, 1946) as well as some opera and religious-themed films (*Rigoletto*, Gallone, 1947), and were exhibited

fairly successfully to a select art-house audience, usually but not exclusively with English subtitles (Marcarini 2001: 51-4). The 1950s, on the other hand, as Marcarini's research suggests, were a decisive moment for the marketing of Italian films in the UK (p. 60). A good proportion of Italian films circulating in the UK during this period were co-productions, often in partnership with France and/or with the United States. These included genre titles, mostly comedies (*Guardie e ladri/Cops and Robbers,* Monicelli, 1951) and melodramas (*Anna,* Lattuada, 1951), but also opera films/regional musicals (*Carosello napoletano/Neapolitan Carousel,* Giannini, 1954), costume adventures (*Il ladro di Venezia/The Thief of Venice*, Brahm, 1950) and pepla (*Le fatiche di Ercole/The Labours of Hercules,* Francisci, 1957). Increasingly, some films were given a double-version release, subtitled and dubbed (*Riso Amaro/Bitter Rice,* De Santis, 1949), or prepared exclusively in a dubbed version (*Persiane Chiuse/Behind Closed Shutters,* Comencini, 1951).

Existing archival evidence suggests many Italian films were dubbed into English in England during this period. The first example I know of is *Don Bosco* (*St John Bosco,* Alessandrini, 1935), a religious-themed film produced by the Italian film company Lux which was circulated in the UK in 1949 by the Salesian College, Battersea, and the Catholic Truth Society. The English version edited with "dubbed dialogue and commentary" was commissioned by Concord Productions. It was directed by J. Gardner Lewis and revoiced by actors Abraham Sofaer and David Spenser (*MFB* 1949: 11). Story and cinematography were critically praised, but the English dubbing was resented: "[it] is a little irritating, as the actors look so essentially Continental" (p. 12).

The double-version release of *Bitter Rice* in 1950 seems to have represented a commercial breakthrough for dubbed Italian films in the UK. Distributed in the UK by Gelardi Rashbrooke & Co., the dubbed version was exhibited at the Tatler in Charing Cross in December 1950 after the successful run of the subtitled print at the Rialto earlier in the same year (Marcarini 2001: 151). This early dubbing, prepared in one of William De Lane Lea's dubbing facilities in Hammersmith and Central London, was soon followed by *I miserabili* (Freda, 1948), released as *Les Miserables* by distributor Archway in an English dubbed version with dialogue by Molly Stevens. De Lane Lea and Stevens appear to have worked together

for several years, adapting a large number of non-English-language films for the British market including the Mexican *Dona Diabla* (*The Devil is a Woman*, Davison, 1950) and the Swedish *Sant Hander Inte Har* (*High Tension*, Bergman, 1950) (S. L. 1947: 10)[2]. While praising De Lane Lea's dubbing process for the Italian *Les Miserables*, which "repeated" the success achieved with *Bitter Rice*, the *MFB*'s critic (signed C. B.) also conceded that "the marriage of English words to the mouthing and playing of foreign actors inevitably remain[ed] uncomfortable" (C. B. 1951: 372).

Fan letters in the popular press, however, suggest that not all viewers entirely disapproved of dubbing. One illustrative example comes from the readers' comments section published in *Picturegoer* in March 1951. This short passage, written by a film fan residing in Poling, a small town in Sussex, hints at issues of quality and suggests that a "good" dubbing job could stimulate the general public's appetite for dubbed films: "that excellent Italian movie, *Bitter Rice*, convinced me that other English language versions of foreign films would be equally successful *if given as good a dubbing*" (Douthwaite 1951: 3) (my emphasis).

The trade press and film translation professionals were also found to disagree. Writing in *The Penguin Film Review* in 1947, pioneering UK film translator and head of Rank's Foreign Film Department Julia Wolf[3] observed that

> In this country, [dubbing] is in its infancy, and we have much to learn. Despite the outcry of the highbrows against dubbed films, it is inevitable that we continue our experiments in this direction if the continental film is to be enjoyed by wider audiences. (Wolf 1947: 93)

Other Italian titles, many of them produced by Lux, circulated in a dubbed version. Exact numbers are not known, but they included:

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[2] Before pairing with De Lane Lea, Stevens was credited as author of the English version of the French *Behold Beatrice* (de Marguenat 1943) prepared with a dubbing method called Linguasyncrone.

[3] On Wolf's ground-breaking work see Mazdon and Wheatley (2013: 11; 27-8; 71). For her career as a subtitler refer also to Carol O'Sullivan's British Academy-funded project, "Women Subtitlers in the UK Film Industry, 1931-1949" https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/projects/women-subtitlers-in-the-uk-film-industry-1931-1949

L'inafferrabile 12 (*Double Trouble,* Mattoli, 1950), *Gli inesorabili* (*Sicilian Story*, Mastrocinque, 1950), *Behind Closed Shutters*, *Cops and Robbers*, *II brigante Musolino* (*Fugitive,* Camerini, 1950), *Anna*, *II mondo le condanna* (*The World Condemns Them,* Franciolini, 1953), *I sette dell'orsa maggiore* (*Human Torpedoes*, Coletti, 1953), *L'oro di Napoli* (*Gold of Naples,* De Sica, 1954), released in 1956, and *Peccato che sia una canaglia* (*Too Bad She's Bad*, Blasetti, 1954), released in 1957.

British distributor Archway, looking to expand their audience base, showed dubbed versions of Italian films to London audiences as single features at the Pavilion cinema in the West End or at the Marble Arch Pavilion, a ground-breaking marketing strategy if we consider that Italian films were usually released in a double-feature programme (Marcarini 2001: 131).

A historically illuminating case is *Behind Closed Shutters*, a crime melodrama which had an exceptional five-week run at the Marble Arch Pavilion (Marcarini 2001: 56). The English-language dialogue of *Behind Closed Shutters* was again by Molly Stevens, with dubbing work directed by De Lane Lea. The film critics appreciated the quality of this dubbed version, yet they still remained hostile to dubbing in general. The anonymous reviewer for the *MFB* complained:

> The more sensational aspects of the story are crudely emphasised yet the result is surprisingly tame. Perhaps the dubbing into nice, simple English is partly to blame, skilfully as it is contrived from a technical point of view. (*MFB* 1952: 52)

A short, spoken exchange from the film, as it was performed in Italian and in English, can be examined to test the film reviewer's observation of "nice simple English". In this sequence, Sandra (Eleonora Rossi Drago) is desperately searching for her sister Lucia (Liliana Gerace), who has left her family home and disappeared without a trace. Accompanied by her boss Barale (Antonio Nicotra) and his friend, sex worker "Pippo" (Giulietta Masina), the naïve Sandra enters a busy night club looking for Edmondo, hoping he might have some information regarding Lucia's whereabouts. The small company is instead received by Gianna (Cesarina Gherardi), a *femme fatale* involved in the club's prostitution ring. The dialogue is edited for the most part as a shot-reverse-shot exchange with speech in close-up (Table 1).

The Italian-language version of *Behind Closed Shutters* was post-synchronised in Rome, and part of the Italian cast was dubbed by professional voice actors, as customary in Italy. Experienced voice actress Lydia Simoneschi lent her voice to the lead character Sandra, interpreted by the emerging Rossi Drago. Gherardi (herself also a voice actress) was dubbed by Tina Lattanzi, a stage and screen actress who had been part of the dubbing workers' association *Cooperativa Doppiatori Cinematografici* since its inception in the mid-1940s.

The two women interpreted by Masina and Gherardi/Lattanzi are depicted as underworld characters. In both versions, their verbal expression is more colloquial and less refined, in opposition to the middle-class Sandra and her fiancé Roberto (Massimo Girotti).

TABLE 1
Excerpts from Italian-language and English-language versions of *Persiane Chiuse* (*Behind Closed Shutters*, Comencini, 1951)

Characters	*Italian dialogue*	*Translation*	*English dialogue*
Gianna:	*Hey! Cerchi Edmondo?*	Hey! Are you looking for Edmondo?	Hey! Looking for Edmondo?
Pippo:	*Sì.*	Yes.	Yes.
Gianna:	*Ha mandato me al suo posto. Ha detto che vi aspetta al Columbia?*	He sent me on his behalf. He said that he'll wait for you at the Columbia.	He left me to deal with you. You're to meet him at the Columbia.
Sandra:	*Al Columbia?*	At the Columbia?	Columbia?
Pippo:	*Ma quando l'hai visto Edmondo?*	But when did you see him, Edmondo?	What, you [indistinct]?
Barale:	*Lei chi è?*	Who are you? (formal you)	That's right!
Gianna:	*Ma signorina non si preoccupi, non ha gettato via i suoi soldi. C'è una persona che le vuole parlare.*	But Miss do not worry, you have not thrown your money away. There is a person who wants to speak to you. (formal you)	Worried about your money, you'll get your pennies. There's a person there that wants to speak to her.
Sandra:	*Una persona?*	A person?	Can't you tell me who it is?

(*continued on next page*)

TABLE 1 (*continued from previous page*)

Pippo:	*E chi è questa persona?*	And who is this person?	Yeah who is it you got there?
Gianna:	*Lo vedrai, non perdete tempo, vi sta già aspettando.*	You'll see, don't waste time, s/he is already waiting for you.	Trust-a me, you better get right over there and find out.
Sandra:	*Dove?*	Where?	Over where?
Gianna:	*Ve l'ho già detto, al Columbia, il locale dove lavora la signorina Pippo.*	I've already told you, at the Columbia, the club where Miss Pippo works.	Where I said, Columbia. Ask her, she works there, doesn't she?

As it appears from this brief passage, Stevens and De Lane Lea's English version maintains close semantic correspondence with the Italian text. Some noticeable lexical and syntactical changes were performed (e.g., "*Lei chi è?*" > "That's right!"; or "*Una persona?*" > "Can't you tell me who it is?"), most likely in the attempt to improve lip synching, for example by adding or reducing the number of syllables and by matching as far as possible labial movements and open/closed vowels. On the acoustic level of characterisation, the Italian version generally maintains a standard Italian pronunciation. The English version, instead, re-interprets and reinforces the characters' sociolinguistic identity by giving the streetwise Gianna and "Pippo" an inner-city twang, whereas the righteous Sandra (Rossi Drago/Simoneschi) speaks with a strongly defined RP. On the other hand, the majority of the English cast speak in RP, including Sandra's sister Lucia (Liliana Gerace), the slick blackmailing pimp Edmondo (Octavio Señoret), the police chief and the prostitutes met by Sandra in prison in her desperate search for Lucia.

Reviewing a New York screening of this British dubbed version, the *Variety* film critic lauded the technical results but was not particularly impressed by the British English pronunciation, which the American critic perceived as Cockney, rather than as "nice, simple" English:

> Technically is a competent job, but it's decidedly incongruous to hear a Cockney accent emanate from the lips of the Italian cast. If the voice synchronization utilized American actors there's a possibility that U.S. audiences would accept the technique more readily. (Gilb. 1952: 18)

British accents were not always popular with UK critics either. Reviewing World War II drama *I sette dell'ora maggiore* (*Human Torpedoes*, Coletti, 1953), released in the UK by Archway in an English version directed by De Lane Lea, a *MFB* critic reflected on sociolinguistic differences emerging from the speech characterisation of Marion (Rossi Drago), the Navy officers and scuba divers: "the English dubbing has the effect of turning most of the Italian frogmen into earthy, British types and Eleonora Rossi Drago into a tight lipped heroine from Kensington" (*MFB* 1954: 107).The genteel RP of the dubbed cast of *Anna*, a sensationalist drama with a religious twist exploiting the popularity of Silvana Mangano, was greeted with similar dismay by critic Eric Rhode (signed E. R.):

> The realism of the operation scenes, the passion of the love scenes, the sensuality of the night club scenes are made incongruously absurd by the dubbed voices, which sound like the B.B.C. repertory company performing a Sunday afternoon matinee. (Rhode 1952: 153)

The English dubbed version of *Anna* was also prepared by Stevens and De Lane Lea, who were credited in the *MFB* as dialogue writer and director respectively (an acknowledgment rarely found in the press).

Even if historical evidence is patchy, findings suggest that English-language dubbings prepared by De Lane Lea's studios in London elicited mixed reviews from critics, translation professionals and the general public. As textual analysis and critical commentary of *Behind Closed Shutters* and *Human Torpedoes* reveal, accents of British English (RP, cockney accent) were often used to signal characters' social status. The RP accent, in particular, regionally non-specific but connoted diastratically, was also used more generally – as in the undifferentiated use of "B.B.C." English in *Anna* – to reproduce the habitual use of standard Italian in post-synchronised Italian speech. The next section will discuss the introduction of the American English variety, a phenomenon which was to cause further deterioration in critics' attitudes towards dubbed films.

4. "An American idea of what Italian should sound like in English": The Americanisation of distribution and dubbing

In the 1960s, the UK market for Italian films continued to expand and

diversify (Marcarini 2001: 29-35). Genre films, including mythological and pseudo-historical epics, costume dramas, spaghetti westerns, spy-adventure films and horrors, many of which increasingly tantalised spectators with sexual innuendos, were targeted to less sophisticated audiences (e.g., *I pianeti contro di noi/Hands of a Killer*, Ferrara, 1962; *Il gladiatore di Roma/Battles of the Gladiators*, Costa, 1962; *II boia di Venezia/The Executioner of Venice*, Capuano, 1963). Auteur films were also marketed by leveraging Italian films' sensual continental appeal. They normally circulated in subtitled form and were released on the art-house circuit (e.g., *L'avventura*, Antonioni, 1960). If they went on to become a box-office success, a dubbed version might have followed to grant an even wider release (*La dolce vita*, Fellini, 1961). Some auteur titles appeared in a dubbed version only (e.g., *Il momento della verità/The Moment of Truth,* Rosi, 1964; *Satyricon/Fellini's Satyricon*, Fellini, 1969).

From the early 1960s, North American companies increasingly controlled international distribution rights for Italian genre films and for a number of arthouse titles, which they often also co-produced (as in the case of *The Leopard*) (Guback 1985: 477-80). North American companies had distributed Italian titles in the United States and outside Italy during the 1950s (e.g., *Il cammino della speranza/The path of hope*, Germi, 1950; *Pane, amore e fantasia/ Bread, love and dreams*, Comencini, 1953), and American English dubbings circulated in the UK during this earlier period too. See, for example, *La provinciale* (*The Wayward Wife*, Soldati, 1953), distributed in the UK by Gala. Cashing in on the star appeal of Gina Lollobrigida, the film ran successfully between November 1955 and January 1956 at the Cinephone in Oxford Street in London (Marcarini 2001: 64). In the 1960s, however, this distribution pattern increasingly became the norm. Changes to distribution channels brought about changes in marketing agendas, which in turn impacted localisation strategies and issues of quality. The result was that when Italian films reached the UK or any other English-speaking market through American distribution, they had been dubbed into American English. Due to increased American control of the Italy-UK film trade, the American English accent, and Italian-accented English, became more widespread.

An illustrative example is found in *La Ciociara* (*Two Women,* De Sica, 1961). An Italo-French co-production, distributed by

Joe Levine's Embassy, this wartime drama was initially released with subtitles in the English-speaking market from March 1961[4]. Scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini and director Vittorio De Sica, already known to the American public for their award-winning neorealist drama *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves,* De Sica, 1948), reinforced the artistic reputation of *Two Women*. The film's popular appeal was based on its emotional storyline and star Sophia Loren, whose dramatic performance won her Best Actress prizes at Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Awards: the first Oscar given to an actress in a 'foreign-language' film. In the dubbed version of *Two Women*, Sophia Loren also revoiced herself in English, validating the traditional critical demand for an authentic correspondence between voice and body.

Two Women in its dubbed form circulated successfully in cinemas across the United States alongside the subtitled print from September 1961 onwards (*Boxoffice* 1961: 6; 1962: 8). In the UK, the film arrived through the British distributor Gala. Gala was interested in foreign-language pictures to screen in affiliate cinema chains (e.g., the Jacey circuit) and was about to sign a deal with Columbia, which held distribution rights for some Italian films (*The Daily Cinema* 1962: 1, 9). Throughout the summer and autumn of 1961, a subtitled X-rated version of *Two Women* ran in Central London, at the Ritz in Leicester Square and the Continentale (*The Observer* 1961: 21), and in Manchester, at the central Cinephone on Market Street (*The Guardian* 1961: 11). The dubbed version stayed in circulation for longer and was still showing at the Gala Royal in London together with Brigitte Bardot's *A Very Private Affair* in April 1963 (*The Observer* 1963: 21). This arguably points at the mainstream appeal of the film if circulated in a more easily accessible dubbed version[5]. In Italy, the dubbing of mythological pepla and other low-budget genre films was not given the same level of care as up-market titles such as *Two Women*.

[4] The subtitled version was approved by the New York state censors in March 1961, NYSA, file no. 68436; box n. 2269. The English translation script submitted to the New York film office was signed by Melton S. Davis.

[5] No reviews of the dubbed version were found in the British newspapers or in the specialised film press.

4.1. Dubbing in Rome: Low-budget, Low quality

The increasing availability of native English-speaking actors and its well-established dubbing facilities made Rome one of the most specialised centres for this activity in the world. In the 1950s and 60s, there were many English-speaking actors in Rome because of Hollywood's shooting activities at *Cinecittà* and in other film studios of the city. Italy's capital had been a busy dubbing centre since the early 1930s, when the translation of foreign-language films, mostly American, was regulated and standardised by the government (Mereu Keating 2016). Interlingual as well as intralingual dubbing had quickly become the norm in film post-production (Mereu Keating 2019). The proximity to production sites as well as to the distribution offices of several dubbing associations such as the CDC, ODI, as well as the American-owned dubbing studios of MGM (Mereu Keating 2019: 72-73), and later American International Pictures (Marcarini 2001: 167), guaranteed post-synchronisation of a large number of films, Italian and foreign. Dubbing in Rome was, in this sense, an economically viable option. However, perceived quality standards were sacrificed on more than one occasion to meet demand for quick distribution (Marcarini 2001: 155, 161, 167).

Roman dubbing studios responded to the distributors' requests to employ American voices, sometimes even if actors or characters were British (Marcarini 2001: 165). One illustrative case is the English dubbing of *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini, 1960). According to British critic, actor and translator John Francis Lane, the English dubbing of Fellini's multilingual cast, edited for UK distribution after the film's successful subtitled run at the cinemas Columbia and Curzon in London, was coloured with "mild off-cockney" accents to match the Romanesco of the Italian version[6]. As discussed by Lane, Columbia's distributors, unhappy with these creative British-sounding localisation choices, prevented the release of this UK version in the States and redubbed the film in American English (Lane 1961: 30, 34 cited in Marcarini 2001: 344). As in the *Two Women*

[6] Allegedly, during the shooting of the film, in which Lane played one of the reporters at Sylvia's press conference, the director asked Lane to prepare an English-language version of the script and to supervise the film's dubbing into English. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jun/24/john-francis-lane-obituary.

case, I could not find any reviews of Lane's British-English version in the British press, and although a dubbed copy of the film was still circulating in the UK in 1964, it is unclear whether this was the British or the American version (*The Observer* 1964: 22).

British reviewers continued to express dissatisfaction with American dubbing of Italian films. Most critical reviews are of popular genre films, such as the Roman-Greek mythical spectacle series starring muscular American actor Steven Reeves in *Le fatiche di Ercole* (*Hercules*, Francisci, 1957) and *Ercole e la Regina di Lidia* (*Hercules Unchained*, Francisci, 1959). These titles travelled in a dubbed version where Reeves looped himself[7]. A further example in the sword-and-sandal series is *La vendetta di Ercole* (*Goliath and the Dragon*, Cottafavi, 1960) an Italo-French co-production, starring American actors Mark Forest and Broderick Crawford and a mixed French and Italian cast. This dubbed version was, according to the British reviewer, "hopelessly confused" and further "reduced to ridicule by the American dubbing" (*MFB* 1961: 117).

Low-budget genre films dubbed in American English were usually edited heavily for the American second and third-run circuits, and for the British double-bill programme. These localisation strategies regularly annoyed the British Film Institute's critics, who commented on the "flat and harsh" transatlantic voices on Italian films, which provided "an unnecessary jolt" (*MFB* 1952: 93), "a final blow to any conviction the film might once have carried" (*MFB* 1951: 340)[8], "a remarkably unexciting and dull" effect (*MFB* 1953: 137), or "as usual, an American idea of what Italian should sound like in English" (*MFB* 1965: 185).

Meanwhile, Italian westerns, though often multilingual, were usually dubbed in Rome into a variety of English accents. Italian voice actors dubbed only the smaller parts, to retain a native intonation for Italian flavour. If native English speakers, actors of westerns usually looped themselves for the English version. This is the case with *Per un pugno di dollari* (*A Fistful of Dollars,* Leone,

[7] It is still unclear whether the versions were adapted and recorded in Rome or New York.

[8] *Fabiola* (Blasetti, 1949) was a French-Italian co-production distributed in the UK by British Lion. Marc Connelly and Fred Pressburger are the credited English language adapters (p. 339).

1964), an Italian-German-Spanish co-production starring Clint Eastwood whose English dialogue was adapted by Mark Lovell (*MFB* 1967: 96), and *Pochi dollari per Django* (*A Few Dollars for Django*, Klimovsky, 1966) (*MFB* 1967: 96-97). Reviews of dubbed Italian westerns published in the British local and national newspaper press suggest that these English-language versions were more popular with the general public than with the highbrow critics of London's specialised film press. Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars*, for example, was "reasonably well dubbed" according to the anonymous reviewer of the *Walsall Observer* (1967: 16). Even if "at times appalling,", the dubbing nonetheless had "a vigour, a zest, a sniff of mockery about it", conceded Madeleine Warmsworth, reviewing a London screening of the film for the *Sunday Mirror* (1967: 25). The English-language version of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, the third and final instalment in Leone's so called 'dollars trilogy', was also welcomed by the film reviewer of the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*: "I haven't seen its predecessors, but the film convinced me that this type of production made for the international market with dialogue dubbed later, need not be all bad" (Williams 1968: 4).

5. The dubbed (Italian) film in the UK, doomed to failure? Final considerations

The account above has shown that during the 1950s and 60s, a large number of Italian films were distributed in the UK in a dubbed version. Following the successful release of *Bitter Rice*, which ran in a subtitled version first, and was then dubbed to circulate more widely in 1950, several other Italian films entered the UK theatrical chain exclusively in a dubbed version (e.g., *Behind Closed Shutters* in 1951). The quality of London-based dubbing, pioneered by William De Lane Lea and Molly Stevens, was criticised by the British trade and popular press. Reception of dubbed films changed significantly once Italian films travelled almost exclusively under the American distribution flag or thanks to Anglo-American deals (e.g., Gala/Columbia). New research presented here outlines the move away from a British-sounding product (RP, cockney accent), to the predominance of American English alongside instances of Italian-accented English.

This variation in the linguistic identity of dubbed speech points to the complex geographies of film dubbing and to the powerful influence that American distributors had in the production and global circulation of Italian films from the 1950s onwards. American English appears to have prevailed both in the case of auteur titles (e.g., Fellini's films) and in serialised adventure narratives (e.g., the peplum genre). These dubbings were usually prepared in Rome's numerous sound post-synchronisation facilities and employed readily available acting and technical expertise, at a lower cost. There are also examples of dubbing and final film editing and processing carried out in New York, unsupervised by the film director as in the infamous case of *The Leopard*, but also in other films rerouted to London via New York (*Two Women*).

Primary research is still needed to determine how many Italian films circulated in a dubbed English version in Britain, how many of these films were dubbed in London, Rome and New York, and how many were dubbed using varieties of British English, American English and Italian-accented characterisation. Comparative research should also investigate where American distribution affected the distribution and reception of the English dubbing of non-Italian and non-Western films.

Although there is a substantial amount of evidence to say that British press critics despised dubbing, at least publicly, Italian films dubbed into English did enjoy wide distribution in the UK in the 1950s and 60s. During this twenty-year period, a not-so-clear-cut exhibition dichotomy had emerged in the UK. Arthouse cinemas in London and other major urban centres showed mostly auteur films with subtitles. Londoners, however, enjoyed their share of dubbed films too, especially from the late 1950s onwards, when more and more commercial cinemas lured moviegoers in with the promise of risqué content (e.g., X rated melodramas in a double-bill programme). Dubbed Italian films, on the other hand, circulated in a broader range of venues outside the art circuit and central London to attract a larger number of patrons and had the potential to become more successful at the box office than their subtitled counterparts if their distribution was driven by informed marketing campaigns and coordinated exhibition plans (Charlesworth 1957: 6).

Italian-English exchange is particularly interesting because it continuously problematises questions of *national identity* and

originality, presenting transnational, rather than international, patterns of film production and distribution. My findings in this sense support Fadda and Noto's argument that in order to rethink Italian cinema's global dimension, scholars should also come to terms with its many historical transnational transformations, and to explore them with interdisciplinary tools of analysis and interpretation (2020: 41). Historical and cross-disciplinary research on the linguistic aspects of dubbing productively untangles the geographical and labour complexities of Italy's film industry at this temporal crossroads.

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