



# «CANNIBALE»'S TRANSLATIONS AND THE RECEPTION OF US UNDERGROUND COMIX IN ITALY

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Questo articolo presenta un'analisi contrastiva delle traduzioni dall'inglese all'italiano di un corpus di tavole appartenenti alla scena fumettistica underground statunitense (underground comix), pubblicate nel nono e ultimo numero della rivista a fumetti di stampo radicale «Cannibale», intitolato «USA Only» (Luglio 1979). Lo studio poggia sugli strumenti metodologici forniti dalla semiotica (analisi isotopica e timica) e dalle teorie sulla multimodalità. «Cannibale USA Only» rappresenta un ponte tra due esperienze, raccogliendo le opere dei fumettisti underground statunitensi selezionate e tradotte da fumettisti appartenenti alla scena underground italiana durante gli Anni di Piombo. L'obiettivo dello studio è dunque investigare i frame ermeneutici adottati e i processi di significazione attivati nel trasferimento in italiano e nel milieu underground italiano di una produzione controversa, figlia dei turbolenti anni della Controcultura statunitense, a cavallo tra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta. Due casi di studio sono discussi in particolare, entrambi nati dalla penna di Greg Irons e Tom Veitch e pubblicati nel secondo (e conclusivo) numero della rivista «Deviant Slice» (1973): un racconto senza titolo che apre il volume di «Cannibale» e *You got a point there, pop!* (translated as *Gran perdita di punti, amico!*), opera che chiude l'antologia con un'emblematica scena di cannibalismo.

By relying on the tools provided by semiotics (in particular, isotopic and thymic analysis) and multimodality, this paper presents a contrastive analysis of the Italian translations of a selection of works belonging to the US underground comix phenomenon, which were published in the ninth and last issue of the radical comics magazine «Cannibale» entitled «USA Only» (July 1979). This represents a critical publication since it includes works by US underground cartoonists which were selected and translated by Italian underground cartoonists during the Years of Lead, thus establishing a bridge between the two experiences. The aim of the study is to investigate the hermeneutic frames adopted and the signifying processes triggered by the transfer into the Italian language and underground milieu of the controversial production which characterised the turbulent years of the US Counterculture (mid 1960s-mid 1970s). In particular, the paper discusses the translation of two works by cartoonist Greg Irons and writer Tom Veitch, originally published in the second and last issue of «Deviant Slice Funnies» (1973): a 14-page untitled story opening «Cannibale»'s issue and the 10-page story entitled *You got a point there, pop!* (translated as *Gran perdita di punti, amico!*), ending the publication with an emblematic scene of cannibalism.

## I UNDERGROUND ROUTES

Underground comix<sup>1</sup> is an umbrella concept which comprises a heterogeneous production of comics belonging to the US counterculture period

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<sup>1</sup> See MARK JAMES ESTREN, *A History of Underground Comics*, Berkeley: Ronin Publishing 1974; PATRICK ROSENKRANZ, *Rebel Visions: The Underground Comix Revolution, 1963–1975*, Seattle, Fantagraphics Books 2002; DEZ SKINN, *Comix: The Underground Revolution*, New York, Thunder's Mouth Press 2004; JAMES DANKY and DENIS KITCHEN (eds.), *Underground Classics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix*, New York: Harry N. Abrams/ComicArts 2009.

(mid-1960s to mid-1970s),<sup>2</sup> i.e., in the convergence of political repression and resistance, psychedelic drugs, sexual liberation, civil rights and anti-authoritarian protest movements and printing technology innovations.<sup>3</sup> For the underground cartoonists this was also a time of experimentation with the medium of comics and the communicative power granted by the interplay of images and words. Comix accompanied and graphically interpreted this complex, multifaceted era and its parabola. Their needle-sharp satire mixed unfettered verbal language and explicit visual contents to tackle such taboo themes as sex and drugs, radical politics, psychology, religion, with a «dogmatic insistence on totally unrestricted self-expression».<sup>4</sup>

In a sort of quest for authenticity and freedom of expression, comix aimed to challenge the hypocrisy of the sanctimonious ‘square’ society as well as the so-called Comics Code Authority (CCA),<sup>5</sup> a self-imposed censorship body adopted in 1954 by the comics industry to regulate the content and distribution of comic books. In open contrast with such censorship grip, the libertarian creed prompted underground authors to avoid mainstream channels and publish their comix in fanzine, underground papers (e.g., the «East Village Other» and the «San Francisco Oracle») and college magazines (the University of Texas’s «The Texas Ranger» and Berkley’s «The Pelican»). They even created their own publishing houses (Print Mint, Kitchen Sink, Last Gasp and Rip Off) whose distribution system was based on a web of headshops, poster shops, record stores, flea markets, and street hawkers.

Stretched between silencing attempts and the allure generated by their taboo contents, the originality and artistic value of underground works granted increasing popularity to cartoonists such as Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton, now considered among the ‘Masters of American Comics’<sup>6</sup> in their homeland as well as abroad. Other artists (either by choice or not) did not find their place within mainstream circuits and their works are only available through fanzines and limited prints. The same occurs for their Italian translations: while Crumb and Shelton have received much attention by both independent and mainstream publishers since the late 1960s,<sup>7</sup> other authors were published only in limited-circulation magazines and anthologies.

Founded in Rome in 1977 with a name paying homage to Francis Picabia’s homonymous Dadaist magazine, «Cannibale» was the breeding ground of

<sup>2</sup> See TERRY H. ANDERSON, *The Movement and the Sixties*, New York, Oxford University Press 1995. Cfr. TODD GITLIN, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York, Bantam Books 1993. PETER BRAUNSTEIN and MICHAEL W. DOYLE (eds.) *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, New York, Routledge 2002, 5-14.

<sup>3</sup> On underground press, see SEAN STEWARDS (2011) *On the Ground: An Illustrated Anecdotal History of the Sixties Underground Press in the U.S.*, Oakland, PM Press 2011; ABE PECK, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*, New York, Pantheon Books 1985.

<sup>4</sup> LES DANIELS, *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America*, New York, Bonanza Books 1971, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> On the origins and history of CCA, see DAVID HAJDU, *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How it Changed America*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2008.

<sup>6</sup> CARLIN JOHN *et al.*, *Masters of American Comics*, New Haven, Yale University Press 2005.

<sup>7</sup> The first Italian translation of underground comix – predictably, Crumb’s works – is *Fritz the Cat’s* adventure “Fred the Teenage Girl Pigeon” (1965), published in «linus»’s supplement *Ali Baba Speciale* in December 1968. See ROBERT CRUMB, *Fred the teen-age girl pigeon*, «Ali Baba Speciale», Milan, Milano Libri, 1968.

the experimentations of Italian comics artists Stefano Tamburini, Massimo Mattioli, Filippo Scozzari, Andrea Pazienza and Tanino Liberatore. Its founder, Tamburini, conceived the magazine as the Italian equivalent of *Zap*, the most iconic US underground comix magazine, first issued by Crumb in 1968: harsh, violent and experimentalist.<sup>8</sup> «Cannibale» shared with the US counterpart the desire to push the boundaries of the comics medium and use its communicative power to narrate a complex era of socio-political and generational crisis, infamously labelled Anni di Piombo (literally, Years of Lead).<sup>9</sup> In particular, the years revolving around 1977, which Alino not casually defined «Anno Cannibale»,<sup>10</sup> were characterised by strikes and protests on the street and at the universities. The so-called Movimento del '77 thus showed its two souls: the creative one exemplified by the Indiani Metropolitani and their reserves<sup>11</sup> and the autonomist one represented by far-left collectives and organisations such as Autonomia Operaia. The former was extravagant, spontaneous and artistically irreverent. The latter expressed a direct opposition to the State which often took the form of armed struggle.

«Cannibale» voiced both souls and was among the first comics in Italy to graphically display the violence of the anarchist-insurrectionist fringe of the Movement, the anger of the university students protesting in Rome and Bologna, the iconoclast irony of the Indiani Metropolitani.<sup>12</sup> However, the magazine, likely too hybrid and perhaps ahead of its times to be understood in all its creative potential, only survived for a couple of years. «Cannibale USA Only» (July 1979), its ninth and last issue, was entirely dedicated to the underground sources of inspiration behind the most avant-garde generation of Italian comic authors, whose collaboration with Vincenzo Sparagna will subsequently lead to the birth of the influential magazine «Frigidaire» (1980-2008).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The connection between «Cannibale» and the US underground experience explicitly emerges in Oreste del Buono's interview to «Cannibale»'s founder Stefano Tamburini. ORESTE DEL BUONO, *Cannibalissimo. La banda dei cinque alla prima uscita su diffusione nazionale*, «linus», vol. 7, July 1978, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> See MARC LAZAR and MARIE-ANNE MATARD-BONUCCI (eds.), *Il Libro degli Anni di Piombo. Storia e Memoria del Terrorismo Italiano*, Milan, Rizzoli; GIOVANNI DE LUNA, *Le ragioni di un decennio*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2009. GUIDO CRAINZ, *Autobiografia di una repubblica. Le radici dell'Italia attuale*. Rome, Donzelli Editore 2009, p. 121. NANNI BALESTRINI, PRIMO MORONI, *L'orda d'oro 1968-1977*, third ed., Milan, Feltrinelli, 2003; SERGIO BRANCATO, *Il piombo e l'inchostro. Ragioni e sentimenti di un decennio*, in COMICON, *'77 anno cannibale: storie e fumetti da un anno di svolta*, Naples, Comicon 2017.

<sup>10</sup> ALINO, Untitled, in COMICON, *'77 anno cannibale: storie e fumetti da un anno di svolta*, Naples, Comicon 2017, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See ECHAURREN PABLO, *La casa del desiderio. '77: Indiani Metropolitani e Altri Strani*, Lecce, Manni 2005; ECHAURREN PABLO, SALARIS CLAUDIA, *Controcultura in Italia (1967-1977)*, Turin, Boringhieri 1999. ECHAURREN PABLO, PAUTASSO GUIDO ANDREA, *Felce e mirtillo. Dalla Beat Generation agli Indiani Metropolitani (1967-1977)*, Milan, Derbylius 1998.

<sup>12</sup> See FABIO DI PIETRO, *Fumetti cannibali. Immaginario e media in una generazione degli autori italiani del fumetto*, Naples, Liguori 2009; COMICON, *'77 anno cannibale: storie e fumetti da un anno di svolta*, Naples, Comicon 2017; FILIPPO SCOZZARI, *Prima Pagare poi Ricordare. Da «Cannibale» a «Frigidaire»*. *Storia di un manipolo di ragazzi geniali*, Rome, Coniglio Editore 2017.

<sup>13</sup> MICHELE MORDENTE, *Cinque cannibali all'assalto del fumetto italiano*, in COMICON, *'77 anno cannibale: storie e fumetti da un anno di svolta*, Naples, Comicon 2017, pp. 113-2; LUCA BOSCHI, *Friego, valvole e balloons: viaggio in vent'anni di fumetto italiano d'autore*, Milan, Costa & Nolan 1998.

«Cannibale USA Only» is also important because it includes works by Greg Irons, Tom Veitch, Kim Deitch, S. Clay Wilson, Mary Kay Brown, the only woman of the group, Spain Rodriguez, Robert Williams and Justin Green, for most of whom, these are the only Italian translations available.<sup>14</sup> In fact, «Cannibale USA Only» was not the first issue featuring US underground author.<sup>15</sup> Notably, in May 1979 issue «Cannibale Boothleg», the editors even plunged into a polemic with «linus» by publishing the original version of Corben's *The Beast of Wolfston* in contrast with its first Italian translation, which had been published and visually censored by «linus»'s supplement, *Alter Alter*, in October 1978. The choice to host some testimonies of the US underground experience and defend them from censorship speaks volume about the bridge between these cartoonists and their overseas comrades.

## 2 (COUNTER-)CULTURAL BRIDGES: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO SUBVERSIVE TRANSLATIONS

One of the most widely applied metaphors of translation is precisely that of a bridge between cultures.<sup>16</sup> Stemming from this suggestive idea, the present paper delves into the study of translation as what we may ironically call an underground tunnel with the aim to explore the connection between countercultures rather than cultures, between subversive, non-normative productions and, as such, subversive non-normative translation acts.

First, it is important to stress that «Cannibale»'s cartoonists were not professional translators and generally lacked the expertise required to approach the US commix as well as any other comics with philological accuracy, which was the last of their interests. This does obviously not affect the linguistic and cultural value of an analysis focused on the mechanisms underlying their translations.

In general, the translator is a cultural mediator<sup>17</sup> – in this case, a counter-cultural one – who can select, highlight, silence, conceal, and transform linguistic and cultural elements. The translator actualises a series of either conscious or unconscious conditionings, what Toury defined norms,<sup>18</sup> which are not only institutionalised regulations from established authorities, but also values, ideas, and habits shared by community members. Lefevere spoke of refraction process<sup>19</sup> in respect to translations, which reflects a particular ide-

<sup>14</sup> The translation work was carried out by Filippo Scozzari and Massimo Mattioli.

<sup>15</sup> In May 1979, an unlicensed story by Richard Corben, called *Moschi* (*Flys*, originally published in «Hot Stuf» 1 in 1974) was published in «Cannibale Bootleg», while in June «Cannibale Science Friction» included Tamburini's translation of *Hawkins*, a work illustrated by Tom Veitch and written by Jack Jackson (published in «Slow Death» 4 in 1972).

<sup>16</sup> See JAMES ST. ANDRÉ, *Metaphors for Translation*, in YVES GAMBIER and LUC VAN DOORSLAER, *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing 2011, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> DAVID KATAN, *L'importanza della cultura nella traduzione*, in MARGHERITA ULRYCH (ed.), *Un approccio multidisciplinare*, Milan, UTET 1997, pp. 31-74.

<sup>18</sup> GIDEON TOURY, *Descriptive Translation Studies and beyond*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins 1995.

<sup>19</sup> ANDRÉ LEFEVERE, *Translation, rewriting and the manipulation of literary fame*, London, Routledge, 1992.

ology, no matter what their purpose is. Recent developments in translation studies have consistently stressed the utmost importance of overcoming approaches inflexibly linked to linguistic structures alone by bridging the linguistic analysis of translation with a reflection on extra-textual discourses (cultural, aesthetic, political, ideological), with a broader focus encompassing the particularities of the cultural systems producing and receiving texts.<sup>20</sup>

Here, these premises are contextualised in the field of comics translation studies. Several scholars advocated the need to tackle comics translation with a more integrated approach which stems from semiotic and sociocultural considerations and encompasses the wholeness rather than the single components of this medium.<sup>21</sup> To analyse how underground comix were translated into Italian and how much of this *generazione cannibale*'s spirit shines through the target text, the semiotic notion of isotopy postulated by Greimas<sup>22</sup> is borrowed.

Isotopies are engendered by reiterating basic units of signification of a text, i.e., its semes (either nuclear semes if invariable, context-independent and specific, or classemes, if variable, context-dependent and generic). The deep semantic structure of a text is thus shaped by the relationship of coherence among such semic elements as well as by their accumulation, concatenation, and hierarchisation. In this respect, isotopic analysis moves beyond words and even chunks of texts to look at all recurring aspects of language within a discourse. The figures (actors, time, space) of a text are thus liable to be thematised in light of the cultural frames the readership is informed by.<sup>23</sup>

In this paper, the notion of isotopy is applied to comics as multimodal artifacts. According to the multimodal theoretical framework, all modes of communication are shaped by historical and sociocultural contexts of use. Based on what people have at their disposal, meanings can be conveyed by combining heterogeneous semiotic resources (images, gesture, posture, and so on). In the case of comics, images contribute to meaning-making along with words and are organised according to their own visual grammar.<sup>24</sup> In this light, isotopies are used to explore semantic coherence of comics in their verbal and visual interactions. The analysis of the two case-studies serves to see how stylistic choices create different interpretive pathways and to un-

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, MONA BAKER, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*, London & New York, Routledge 2006.

<sup>21</sup> UMBERTO ECO, *Apocalittici e Integrati: Comunicazioni di Massa e Teorie della Cultura di Massa*, Milan, Bompiani 1964; THIERRY GROENSTEEN, *Système de la bande dessinée*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France 1999; KAINDL KLAUS, *Thump, Whizz, Poom: A Framework for the Study of Comics under Translation*, «Target» 11:2 (1999), pp. 263-88; FEDERICO ZANETTIN (ed.) *Comics in Translation*, Manchester, St Jerome Publishing 2008; DANIELE BARBIERI, *Semiotica del Fumetto*, Rome, Carocci 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. ALGIRDAS J. GREIMAS, JOSEPH COURTÉS, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Classiques Hachette, Paris 1979. BERTRAND DENIS, *Precis de sémiotique littéraire*, Paris, Nathan 2000; ANDREA BINELLI, *Isotopy as a Critical and Translational Paradigm in the 'Italian' Ulysses*, in Enrico Terrinoni and Franca Ruggieri (eds.), *Joyce in/and Italy. Joyce Studies in Italy* 14, Rome: Edizioni Q 2013, pp. 15-28.

<sup>23</sup> MARVIN MINSKY, *A Framework for Representing Knowledge*, «MIT-AI Laboratory Memo», 1974, p. 306; ID., *The Society of Mind*, New York, Simon & Schuster 1986.

<sup>24</sup> See GUNTHER KRESS, THEO VAN LEEUWEN, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, London, Routledge 2006(1996).



derstand how these isotopic pathways highlight the counterculture-bound frames according to which US underground comix were read and interpreted.

In the interpretation of the two texts and their translations, this paper also looks at the field of semiotics of passion, particularly at the tools of thymic analysis.<sup>25</sup> The thymic dimension regards the categories of euphoria (positive/pleasure), dysphoria (negative/displeasure), phoria (presence of a plurality of pathemic dispositions) and aphoria (absence of pathemic dispositions). Thymic analysis proves useful in this research as, in the case-study considered, critical axiological evaluations are established on the basis of such categories.

### 3 «CANNIBALE» TRANSLATING GREG IRONS AND TOM VEICH'S COMIX

By looking at «Cannibale USA Only», it appears immediately clear how strongly the recipient culture influenced the choice of the stories to include in the volume. These are far from Gilbert Shelton's humorous *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* strips and Crumb's iconic characters, such as Fritz the Cat, Mr Natural and the Snoid. Instead, «Cannibale USA Only» seems to collect the works that somehow reflected the turmoil and the violence of the Years of Lead. This is also exemplified by the choice to begin and end the volume with stories by Greg Irons (drawings) and Tom Veich (writing) originally published in the second and last issue of their editorial project «Deviant Slice Funnies» (1973). The opening one is untitled while the ending one – *You got a point there, pop!* (translated in a footnote as *Gran perdita di punti, amico!*)<sup>26</sup> significantly marks the magazine and its editorial history with an emblematic scene of cannibalism. These are the only Italian translations of the stories by this duo nicknamed GI/TV.

The two cartoonists produced some of the most gruesome, dark comics within the underground milieu in anthological publications such as «Deviant Slice Funnies» (1972-73) and «The Legion of Charlies» (1971). In these works, violence is thematised in all of its facets, though it is never used per se, but rather functional to anti-CCA provocations as well as to develop their committed socio-political satire. The comics medium was used to merge a horror and splatter aesthetics and social commitment, tackling such issues as the Vietnam War, the heroin crisis, women's liberation versus misogyny and patriarchy, anti-pollution and environmentalist actions, consumerism and capitalist perverseness.

<sup>25</sup> On thymic analysis, see PEZZINI ISABELLA, *The Theater of Passions. Anger and enthusiasm in Lady Ly's Les Misérables*, in ISABELLA PEZZINI (ed.), *Paolo Fabbri. Unfolding semiotics. Pour la sémiotique à venir*, Thessaloniki, Hellenic Semiotics Society 2021, pp. 153-60; FABBRI PAOLO, *Che rabbia!*, in ISABELLA PEZZINI and VINCENZA DEL MARCO (eds.), *Passioni collettive. Cultura, politica, società*, Rome, Nuova Cultura 2012; GREIMAS ALGIRDAS JULIEN, FONTANILLE JACQUES, *Sémiotique des passions. Des états des choses aux états d'âmes*, Paris, Seuil 1991.

<sup>26</sup> IRONS GREG, VEITCH TOM, Untitled, «Cannibale USA Only», July, Rome, Primo Carnera 1979, pp. 2-14 (hereafter, UE); ID, Untitled, «Deviant Slice Funnies», Vol. 2, San Francisco, The Print Mint 1973, pp. 2-14 (hereafter, UI). ID, *You got a point there, pop!*, «Deviant Slice Funnies», Vol. 2, San Francisco, The Print Mint 1973, pp. 25-35 (hereafter, YE); ID, *Gran perdita di punti, amico!*, «Cannibale USA Only», July, Rome, Primo Carnera 1979, pp. 71-81 (hereafter, YI).

The gloomy atmosphere of GI/TV's comics offer a glimpse of the sunset of the Sixties' frenzy and optimism, which paved the way for the nihilism and alienation of the subsequent decade.<sup>27</sup> Their satire is bitter and vitriolic and the laughter it engenders comes with a punch in the guts. The crudeness of their graphic realism clashes with the general – and often biased – perception of underground comix as flippant works and represents one of the clearest portrayal of the 1970s' social malaise. In this respect, GI/TV's art graphically witnesses the dark side of the counterculture years. Indeed, far from any superficial mythologisation of the Age of Aquarius, counterculture meant the Summer of Love and Woodstock as well as the beating at Altamont, the naivety of hippies and the brutality of Hell's Angels, the Diggers' utopia and Jonestown's carnage, free love and child abuse, LSD's consciousness expansion and heroin overdoses, "Peace and Love" and "Kill the Pigs" slogans, anti-war flower power and Weathermen Underground's bombs.

Even in visual terms, the duo's works are extremely distant from the typical style of most underground comix. This is evident in the use of black and white and shading. Brightness and saturation are minimum, with grey and black prevailing. Backgrounds are rarely white and points of light are used to further emphasize shadows. Images linked to horror, disgust, death and violence are more realistic and characters are rarely caricature-like. Moreover, most of their stories are tragically self-conclusive, with no recurring characters, and revolve around the human dimension of dread and, in thymic terms, the axiological sphere of dysphoria.

In «Deviant Slice Funnies 2», GI/TV used their cartoon personas as narrators and commentators of the three stories included in the issue.<sup>28</sup> The two characters also served to frame such stories as «[...]ugly comix...caked out residues of two creeps... all part of the cosmic scene of 1973»<sup>29</sup> in contrast with «[...]hippy dope stories and Mr. Snoid getsome ass sell lotsa comix».<sup>30</sup> In their view, comix revolving around «bizarre fuck tales», «funny dope fiends», «sex 'n' dope» resulted in higher sales with respect to GI/TV's ones. While the references to dope stories and dope fiends indirectly evoke Gilbert Shelton's *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, Robert Crumb is openly addressed with the reference to Mr Snoid, one of his most famous characters who represents a personification of the wild fantasies of Freudian Id and is protagonist of several bizarre sex tales. However, the polemic is not with the two guru of underground comix per se. The two authors rather pick on «publishers [that] are always askin' [...] to do somethin' funny for th'fans»

<sup>27</sup> See PETER BRAUNSTEIN, MICHAEL W. DOYLE., *Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, in PETER BRAUNSTEIN and MICHAEL W. DOYLE (eds.) *Imagine Nation: the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, New York, Routledge 2002, 5-14.

<sup>28</sup> This is a clear homage to the narrative procedure of iconic horror magazines by William Gaines's EC Comics which gained fame during the 1940s for their high-quality fiction and satire. The most famous horror anthologies, «Tales from the Crypt», «The Vault of Horror» and «The Haunt of Fear», used the recurring characters of the Crypt-Keeper, Vault-Keeper, and Old Witch as the titular hosts introducing the stories. Although most EC titles were discontinued after the introduction of the CCA in 1954, they represented a source of influence for the subsequent generation of underground cartoonists.

<sup>29</sup> GREG IRONS, TOM VEITCH, «Deviant Slice Funnies», Vol. 2, San Francisco, The Print Mint 1973, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and with those who «compromise for the extra bucks and fame». Their endogenous criticism is directed at certain trends within the underground comix scenario, with some authors prone to ‘sell out’ and exploit themes such as sex and drugs to improve their sales. This is a symptom of a wider split within the 1970s counterculture between those who remain uncompromisingly loyal to the underground cause(s) and those willing to breach the overground market, an opposition which evokes Eco’s famous one between *apocalittici* and *integrati*.<sup>31</sup>

This debate is not included in «Cannibale»’s volume as the editors removed the panels with GI/TV’s alter-egos and rather focused on the translation of the stories included in «Deviant Slice Funnies». <sup>32</sup> However, their choice to deploy GI/TV’s works as opening and ending sections (with the latter showing a cannibalistic act) of the volume is not banal and arguably accounted for by the fascination for such shocking irreverence and radical spirit felt by the Italian underground comics scenario of the late 1970s.

The following analysis uses textual evidence to explore in detail this (counter-)cultural bridge, by looking at the isotopic lines and hermeneutic frames which oriented the reception of GI/TV’s comix in the Italian underground context so as to emphasise contact and divergence points between the two experiences.

### 3.1 THE VIETNAM WAR: AXIOLOGY OF THE RETURN

In clear opposition with the glorification of Vietnam War in US mainstream propaganda, the first story narrates veteran Vince Shazam’s traumatic return to his home in Montana after being discharged. In a few pages, the comics outlines the downfall of a man who is too damaged to return to his former life: since the beginning, he clearly shows the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as he relives the moment in which his Sergeant mutilated him, his missing limb now being replaced by a hook. His parents barely recognise him and, rather than showing empathy, his father pesters him with his pro-Nixon talks and attempts to find him a job to reintegrate him into society. Vince’s refuge is heroin, which turns him into an apathetic, zombie-like figure. As he tries to reconnect with his former friends and lover, he receives a stronger dose by one of them, Lenny the Creep, who is involved in a heroin smuggling operation, with drugs stashed in the soldiers’ dead bodies returning from Vietnam. As his addiction takes over, Shazam abandons any moral and reasoning and ultimately decides to rob a bank to find the money to buy more doses and fly to Mendocino, in California. The robbery ends badly: while experiencing one of his PTSD hallucinations, he slaughters his hostages, mistaking them for his Sergeant and an army of Vietnamese soldiers. In the end, the police open fire against Vince, killing him, while his father turns his back on his own son, with an ultimate act of repudiation which semiotically confers a final negative sanction on any idea of family and nationhood.

<sup>31</sup> UMBERTO ECO, *Apocalittici e Integrati: Comunicazioni di Massa e Teorie della Cultura di Massa*, Milan, Bompiani 1964.

<sup>32</sup> The only exception is the panel introducing *You got a point ther, pop!* which is crucial to contextualise the story and would have been difficult to remove as Veich’s finger exceeds the grid limits and invades the space of the title.



The authors' anti-militarism and, in general, their criticism towards the US 'square' society is thematised in terms of generational conflict (epitomised by the relationship between Vince and his father) and graphic representation of the true outcomes of war, with young people either sent to die on the field or left alone upon their return as heroin addicted, mentally ill, and mutilated. In addition, the story displays a critical stance against heroin and the glamourisation of what may seem a 'sex-drugs-rock 'n'roll' lifestyle.

The consumption of illegal substances such as marijuana, hashish and LSD was welcomed by the counterculture as a political and anti-cultural stance as well as a source of escapism. However, there was a line drawn between good, mind-opening substances and bad, mind-obliterating substances such as heroin and other opiates. Indeed, during that period, drug use began to degenerate into abuse of speed and heroin and overdoses started dropping bodies among counterculture heroes, from musicians (Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Tim Buckley, Keith Moon) to activists (e.g., Diggers' founder Emmett Grogan) and ultimately cartoonists (Rory Hayes) – a tragic fate also shared by «Cannibale»'s Stefano Tamburini and Andrea Paziienza.<sup>33</sup>

As the following examples detail, to develop their arguments, GI/TV structured their story by exploiting what in semiotics is defined thymic categories, teasing the readers with apparent states of euphoria, which are quickly overturned, paving the way for aphoric and dysphoric conditions.

Multimodal isotopies guide the reading and interpretation of these passionate states, providing the hints that positive thymic values are only apparent. In GI/TV's possible world, social conventions, false myths and 'square' expectations hide a negative axiological value and, once truth is revealed, what remains is but dysphoria. Such nihilism is a clear symptom of the 1970s' crisis of the US counterculture as well as of the growing resentment towards the 'overground'. To transfer these currents of feeling into Italian, it is necessary to decode the seesawing pathematic movement of the story through the adequate frames.

### 3.1.1. «HOME FROM THE 'NAM»

Vince's return home from Vietnam may be expected to entail a euphoric state. In this respect, the narrators' captions (which are part of the panel and not isolated in a box) introduce the story with a rhyme (UE/UI, p. 2):

- Panel 1: This is the story of Vince Shazam/ Questa è la storia di Vince Shazam...
- Panel 2: who went to fight in Vietnam/...che se ne andò a combattere in Viet-nam...
- Panel 3: He's come home to old Montan'/'...ed ora è tornado nel vecchio Montana...

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<sup>33</sup> On the countercultural stance against heroin, see TIMOTHY S. MILLER, *The Hippies and American Values*, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press 1991. Cfr. GUIDO BLUMIR, *Eroina. Storia e realtà scientifica. Diffusione in Italia. Manuale di autodifesa* Milan, Feltrinelli, 1976.

- Panel 4: to take up the life that he began/...ove la pace regna sovrana! (literally, "...where peace reigns supreme)<sup>34</sup>

The rhymed captions, at least apparently, convey a sense of levity. On a discourse level, the rhyme opposes the sememes “Vietnam”<sup>35</sup> and “Montan”, the former associated to the verb “fight”, the latter to the nouns “home” and “life”. In translation, “combattere” opposes to “pace”. Thus, Vietnam, itself including the classemes /war/, is associated with the classeme /violence/ (shared by “fight”/“combattere”) whereas Montana (i.e., “home”) is associated to the classeme /life/ in original and /pace/ in Italian. Hence, an opposition between two semes is created in both versions: /violence/ versus /life/ and /peace/, respectively, with perhaps a metanarrative isotopy created by the presence of the classeme /beginning/ in “take up”, “began” and “life”. Thus, since the beginning, an opposition between isotopies is established, one which will accompany the unsteady alternation between positive and negative thymic dispositions.

As for the visual construction of the opening page, on a chromatic level, the background of the first page is left blank, with the white page serving as light source illuminating the scene. The unusual brightness of GI/TV’s panels is further emphasised by the choice to use the colour black for the blank spaces separating them, thus generating a stark contrast. Just as life and peace oppose violence, light opposes darkness. With respect to the gloomy atmospheres characterising GI/TV’s comix, such chromatic choice does not suggest – at first glance – that the story is going to plunge into dysphoria and still, ushers in an impression of emptiness.

The first four same-size panels are constructed with a long-shot view (showing a significant amount of white and hence bright background), an eye-level perspective (i.e., the point of view of equality and reader engagement, with no power difference involved) and by using a static-camera, which is generally used to show small changes and slow down the rhythm of the story. While a dynamic camera increases tension, the static camera conveys a sense of suspension to the scene.

On panel 5, by using a head shot, the focus shifts on Vince’s face which, on a visual level, does not convey the euphoria one may have expected. His expression is lifeless and his gaze expresses something sinister, his eyes being darkened as if they were carved out. Kress and Van Leeuwen argued that the closer the represented participant, the greater the viewers’ engagement.<sup>36</sup> However, though viewers are driven to look at Vince, he does not look back at the interactive participants. His gaze seems to be lost somewhere else. A sense of uneasiness, vagueness and estrangement overcomes the illusory liveliness initially conveyed by the rhyme.

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<sup>34</sup> A literal English translation of the Italian texts is provided by the author of this paper whenever these detach from the original.

<sup>35</sup> Hereafter, lexemes and sememes are indicated by the symbol “lexeme”, while semes and isotopies by: /seme/.

<sup>36</sup> GUNTHER KRESS, THEO VAN LEEUWEN, *Reading Images*, p. 140.

On a verbal level, from panel 5 to panel 9, a *débrayage*<sup>37</sup> in Vince's thought balloons projects the narration into the past: although on a visual level and on the narrative present he is coming home, in his mind he is apparently reliving the fight with the Sergeant who mutilated him. This is a first symptom of his dysphoric passional disposition as well as of his PTSD. In this respect, the narrator's comment on panel 6: «Yep, Vince is home from the Nam!» («Sissiori Vince è a casa!»; «Yessirs, Vince is home!») acquires an ironic connotation, which the Italian version further emphasises with "Sissiori", resembling the circus catchphrase «Venghino siore e siori» («Come ladies and gentlemen»).

Moreover, in the original, the word "Nam", saliently positioned at the end of the sentence in a bold font, couples with the verb "kill" in the thought balloon below. The *classeme* /violence/ is reiterated by "kill" and "bayonet". In Italian, this isotopy is preserved with the translations "accopperò" and "baionetta" and even magnified with several additions: on panel 7, the sentence: «Ti piacerebbe in un occhio?» («Would you like it in your eye?»; referred to the bayonet) is added; on panel 8, the sentence: «How'd you like to go home a month early?», which only implicitly refers to Vince's mutilation, becomes: «Ti piacerebbe un congedo anticipato per ferite? Cheddici, proviamo?», («Would you like an early discharge due to injuries? Let's try, what do you say?») with the addition of "ferite" ("injuries") reiterating explicitly the *classeme* /violence/.

To account for these additions, it is possible that the translator was influenced by the images on the panel above (i.e., the darkened eyes) as well as by the image of the claw replacing his mutilated hand (the outcome of Vince's fight with his Sergeant), on panel 9. The influence of images which reiterate the multimodal isotopy /violence/ may have led the translator to be more explicit as to the inherent aggressiveness. This goes hand in hand with the exaggeration of verbal violence: on panel 6, the slur "cazzo" is added to «Sergente t'accopperò!»; on panel 9, «Fuck yerself sarge!» becomes: «Ficcatela su per il culo, sergente del cazzo!» («Stick it up to your ass, fucking sergeant!»).

Furthermore, the image of the claw ringing the bell once again opposes to the euphoric expectations regarding "home", a contrast which visually dominates the following pages: on page 3 (UE/UI), Vince's father, Fred, who at first fails to recognise his son by looking out of the window, opens the door armed with a gun, which fully occupies panel 7.

Saliency indicates the 'visual weight' of represented participants, in Kress and Van Leeuwen's terms.<sup>38</sup> It is evaluated on the basis of the complex interaction of visual clues which are not objectively measurable but provide a hierarchy of importance among the elements. In this case, saliency is determined by the relative size of the gun, its central position in the visual field, depth (i.e. foreground) and the contrasts in tonal value and colours provided by a white halo surrounding it, in contrast with the subsequent dark panel. Given this visual composition, this object immediately attracts the viewers' attention as they turn the page, even prior to the balloons and the other represented participants (Vince's parents). Therefore, even though fewer figures

<sup>37</sup> The process of projection and disjunction of an utterance away from its enunciative source is called *débrayage* (shifting out). See ALGIRDAS J. GREIMAS, JOSEPH COURTÉS, *Sémiotique*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> GUNTHER KRESS, THEO VAN LEEUWEN, *Reading Images*, p. 177.

partake in the isotopy of violence on this page, it is still pervasive by virtue of its importance from a qualitative viewpoint.

Likewise, on the second panel of page 4, the hug between Vince and his father Fred, rather than expressing warmth and love, is tinged with a dark undertone as the very claw occupies center stage. In the following panel, Vince's mother, Ethel, is represented in tears. However, these are not tears of joy as she claims: «Vince! Oh my Lord! What have they done to my baby?» («Vince! Ohssignore! Cos'han fatto al mio piccolino?»), UE/UI, p. 4). Although she is a marginal character in the story, the figure of the mother is nonetheless emblematic: she is the first who sees Vince and fails to recognize him and, even when he announces himself, she visually and verbally expresses a dysphoric state of sorrow rather than joy. The narrators echo Ethel's reaction to Vince's change, by showing in the subsequent panel a picture of him in uniform with the caption «To the world's greatest mom and dad – Love Vince». The picture divides the first section of the story (i.e., the return) from the subsequent section, that is, the family meal. The reference to the love Vince feels for his parents suggests a euphoric movement, reinforced by the act of hugging his father. However, the narrators' caption jokes about the «changes since the summer of '69» (UE, p. 4), clearly referring to Vince's outlook and disposition (from a smiling and glowing well-shaved face to a skeletal, unshaven grim face) as well as anticipating the deterioration of the bond with his family, particularly his father.

While the mother is seen crying, invoking the Lord and serving food with an apron to 'the men of the house' according to the stereotypical representation of 'square' women, the character of the father symbolises the typical WASP man and the pre-counterculture generation mindset. Fred is constructed as a repulsive figure, slobbering and eating compulsively with animalistic manners (see panel 5, 6 and 7 on page 4; panel 3 and 6 on page 6 for both UE and UI). His feral look while biting ferociously a piece meat, his drooling mouth and gnashing teeth, and the act of grabbing the food with the hands show that the apparently well-mannered and perfect 'square' world is far more savage and feral. From an isotopic point of views, two isotopies, /bestiality/ and /savagery/, dominate the scenes.

The influence and pervasiveness of the pictures likely influenced the translators, who decided to add onomatopoeias to further highlight the chewing sound as Fred speaks while eating savagely: e.g., on page 4 "Chomp" is added; on page 6 "Arf", which is used both for dogs and to emphasize chewing noises, is repeated twice. Both onomatopoeias partake in the construction of the isotopy /eating/ (also visually conveyed by the figures of food present in the panels), the latter also sharing the classeme /bestiality/.

While these isotopies are associated to the character of Fred on a visual level, they are verbally present in his speech as he insults US enemies with such racial slurs as "jungle bunnies" on page 4 ("topi da giungla") and "hun" on page 6 ("crauti"), which refer to Vietnamese and German armies, respectively. While "bunnie" reiterates the classeme /bestiality/, "jungle" and "hun", a term used by the Allies as a slur to define the German army during WWII as a barbarian population, share the classeme /savagery/.

Thus, although the isotopies are the same, on a visual level they connote the father figure and, on a verbal level, US national enemies. This engenders a satirical effect: while he takes it for granted that Vietnamese and German soldiers are animals and savages, readers see him as such a 'savage beast'. In both cases, dehumanisation is used as a rhetorical device to undermine the oppo-

ment, by denying the status of human being to those considered repulsive. In translation, while the slur “jungle bunnies” is translated with “topi da giungla” and thus reiterates the original *classemes*, “hun” is culturally adapted with “crauti”, i.e. sauerkraut, which in Italy is used as a racial slur for German people, thus weakening the isotopy /savagery/.

The satirical opposition is further developed through the isotopies /violence/ (expressed by verbal references to “war”, “smart bombs”, “brought em to their knees”, “World War II”, “took out” and visual items such as the knife he holds while eating and Vince’s claw, the teeth biting the meat), /Americanity/ (conveyed by the reference to “president Nixon” and “American technology” but also by the picture of Vince in his military uniform, on page 4) and /disgust/ (in addition to the drooling mouth, the pieces of food he spits, the spots on his napkin and the verbal reference to B.M., acronym for “Bowel Movement”).

The physical repulsion expressed by Fred couples with the axiological value associated to his character: gluttonous, beastly and vulgar. By channeling his violence and hatred towards Otherness, he avoids all forms of self-knowledge and recognition of his own flaws. Thus, what is evident for the viewers (his repulsive nature) is unacknowledged by himself and projected onto US national enemies. The repulsion towards Vince’s father is the expression of an ethical stance about a man who is consumed by a beastly voracity, the same voracity (and violent force) which characterises the US according to the underground authors, and contempt towards US enemies. Indeed, GI/TV’s criticism towards the US system is thus constructed by the correspondences between /Americanity/ and the multimodal isotopies of /bestiality/, /savagery/, /disgust/ and /violence/.

This also reminds of the countercultural criticism towards the myth of the ‘good war’, which started with World War II and led to the glorification of America as a brave nation which exemplified the good, struggled to defend what was good and won. In this self-appointed image of saviour, America was legitimised to violently attack what was perceived as Evil: totalitarianism, fascism, communism, and everything which was anti-American. Thus, the identity and social cohesion of ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’ was based on and reinforced by the construction of a national enemy. However, just as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki proved how tarnished the ‘good war’ mythology was, the Vietnam War proved how the Manichean division between good and evil concealed and validated brutal actions and the warmongering nature of the US.

The main isotopic pathways which intertwine in the original are preserved in Italian: in the case of /violence/, the original *classemes* can be found in such terms as “guerra”, “bombe intelligenti” and “Seconda guerra mondiale”; /Americanity/ is conveyed by “tecnologia Americana”, though the reference to Nixon is elided, perhaps underestimating the readers’ knowledge of US politics. Actually, the isotopy /violence/ is magnified: e.g., on page 6 (UE/UI), the sentence «[...]we coulda took out the hun in a week!» is amplified as follows: «[...] avremmo spazzato I crauti dalla faccia della terra in meno di una settimana! Macci pensi? Arf arf!» («We could have wiped the sauerkraut off the Earth in less than a week. Can you believe it ? Arf Arf !»). The reference to the violence and the power of US is exaggerated the reduction of the time span from one week to less than a week and by using an hyperbole “spazzare via dalla faccia della terra” which arguably hints at the Americans’ use of the atomic bomb at the end of WWII.



However, what the translation seems to overlook is the original frames according to which the original scene is built, rather preferring a comic rendering of the text.

For example, the utterance: «Ha ha! Feel better, Vince? Nothin like a good b.m. before ya tuck into dinner!» is translated as «Ha ha! Sei più leggero, eh? Non c'è niente di meglio di uno stronzone prima ti mettersi a tavola!» (UE/UI, p. 5). In Italian, the acronym “b.m” (standing for “bowel movement”) is made explicit in a most vulgar form with the augmentative and comic “stronzolone”. The exaggeration of the comic effect by linguistic alterations is frequent in this Italian translation (on page 7, “old man” becomes “vecchiardo”; on page 14, “dad” becomes “babbone”) which consequently focuses on the surface comical image of a disgusting man blabbing about war and enemies, whereas on a deeper level the scene actually serves to connote father figure and, by extension, the US system with a negative axiological value.

### 3.1.2. HEROIN, APHORIA OF THE REASON

As a mind-obliterating substance, heroin plays a crucial role to help Vince cope with the dysphoria of war as well as of his traumatic return to Montana. From a narratological viewpoint, it is the Object triggering the actions of the Subject of the narration, Vince, but from a thymic viewpoint it is also the means to reach a state of aphoria, in which the dysphoric disposition of the protagonist turns into total absence of passions.

Page 5 (UE/UI) is extremely effective in the description of Vince's transformation from tormented veteran to zombie-like figure. Irons draws with clinical detail the preparation of the dose, cleverly using close-ups to increase the dramatic tension of the scene. Viewers then witness the change occurring to him through two close-ups on his eye positioned at the opposites of the page (top panel on the right and bottom panel on the left), first wide open and expressive and then semi-closed and lifeless. At the centre, other three close-ups show the cooking of the dose, Vince's gnashing teeth and the needle penetrating his already punctured skin. Three small panels in sequence show him becoming a skeletal shadow (drawn by using three different scales of grey). Contrary to the stereotype of counterculture as glorification of drug culture, no trace of magnification or compliance is included. Page 6 opens with two panels comparing the right half of Fred's face with the left half of Vince's face: the former is fat and animated by his talks on war, the latter is emaciated and simply nods exhaustedly, prior to fainting on the table and then on the floor.

On a visual level, such figures as the needle, the tie, the spoon, the syringe, the wrappers containing heroin powder all clearly make references to the isotopy /addiction/. It is interesting to observe how such isotopy is also concatenated to that of /death/ and /disgust/: figures such as Vince's lifeless eye and skeletal figure all reiterate the classeme /death/, while, on the following page, the classeme /disgust/ is conveyed by vomit, the food covering Vince's face as he faints on the plate, the graphic close-up on his punctured skin as well as by the aforementioned reference to B.M. made by Vince's father.

On the one hand, death seems an omen of the final carnage triggered by Vince's hallucinations and the very killing of the protagonist. On the other hand, it establishes a comparison between Vince's lifelessness and Lenny's

ruthless smuggling operation involving the dead bodies of US soldiers. Among them, Vince's former acquaintance Julio Rodriguez is mentioned. In the Italian version, Lenny mercilessly mocks the dead friend with the appellation «fessacchio», instead of the original «kid» (UE/UI, p. 10) –thus revealing a recurring translational tendency to use appellatives with altering suffixes for a jokingly derogatory purpose.

As for drug-related slang, which abounds in the original text, the translators assumed that their readers were familiar with terms belonging to the Italian drug-culture (e.g., “skag” is translated with “eroina”, “smack” with “polvere”, “hit/hits” and “little h” with “schizzo/i”, “shit” with “roba”). The loanword from English drug-slang “junkie” is also used in the sentence: «Hey hey! Sei diventato uno di quei militi junkie di cui si legge tanto, eh, Vince?» which translates the English: «Hey hey! You one ‘o them junkie soldiers we heard about Vince?» (UE/UI, p. 8). It is likely that, given the proximity between the US and the Italian underground experiences, the Italian milieu was familiar with the term. Interestingly, the loanword “junkie” is associated with the noun “milite” (a refined translation of “soldier”), which in Italian belongs to the literary lexicon and considerably elevates the register of the discourse. The combination of the English-slang adjective with an overtly high-brow noun engenders a linguist clash which is absent in the original. This choice rather reflects the Dadaist and desecrating attitude of «Cannibale»'s translators, who enjoyed mocking what was sacred for the overground by associating it to the degradation of the drug world. This reminds of the laughter engendered by the tension between a sober and serious culture and a more frivolous, fun one described in Bakhtin's theorisation of the carnevalesque.<sup>39</sup> In original, however, the correlation between serving as a soldier and being a “junkie” is not comical but rather related to the phenomenon of Vietnam's war spreading heavy drug abuse and the idea that the US government was too tolerant about such issue among their troops.

Vince using heroin also serves to deconstruct the myth of ‘sex, drugs, rock’n’roll’ as a countercultural lifestyle, which is glorified by those who superficially label the underground scenario and its values. The alternation of euphoric and dysphoric state is once again used as a device for this purpose. Page 9, in particular, creates a dramatic crescendo from a pathematic viewpoint. Two small panels on the top display a close-up of Vince's sweating skin as he feels the symptoms of abstinence and Lemmy's hand giving him a new dose. Three larger panels follow, one above the other: the first shows Vince's former girlfriend Shelly trying to seduce him on the back of a car, the second presents a close-up of Vince's injection with Shelly holding the tie, and the third a further zoom to the two characters' mouths, suggesting the initiation of a sexual intercourse. However, in the following page the panel showing their tongues intertwining in a kiss couples with one in which Vince covers his lover in vomit. The euphoric movement of the situation, in which lust and fun are supposed to intertwine following the ‘sex and drugs’ stereotypical plot outline is overturned, paving the way for a dysphoric condition, triggered by heroin. Two contrasting isotopies thus guide the reader in the process of construction and deconstruction of their expectations, turning the thymic level of attraction into repulsion, and opposing /sex/ to /disgust/.

The classeme /sex/ is present in visual elements (e.g., Shelly's cleavage and longing gaze towards Vince emerging from the shadow on panel 3; the close-

<sup>39</sup> MICHAEL M. BACHTIN, *L'opera di Rabelais e la cultura popolare* (1965), Turin, Einaudi 2001.

up on the lips of the protagonists and on panel 5 and, on the following page, their tongues intertwined, the onomatopoeia “slup” repeated twice) as well as in the use of the adjective “good” and the epithet “honey” in Shelly’s speech balloons: «Gee, Vincie, member all th’good times we had in high school?» and «Vince honey..».

In translation, the first balloon becomes: «Gee, Vincie, ti ricordi i bei tempi al liceo? Gli ultimi bei cessi puliti...». While the sememe “bei” still partakes to the isotopy, the addition of « Gli ultimi bei cessi puliti...» («The last nice and clean johns...») seems rather odd. A hypothesis may be that the isotopy /disgust/ oriented the translators’ hermeneutic process and led them to add the figure of high school toilettes: although “bei” and “puliti” add the classeme /pleasant/, “ultimi” and “cessi” share the classeme /disgust/ and the opposition between the two classemes may elicit a stronger sense of repulsion towards the narrative present in which the squalor manifests itself even by means of dirty toilettes.

Indeed, the isotopy /disgust/ mixes with /sex/ throughout the sequence of panels and is clearly visualised through the scenes of heroin injection, vomiting, and even by the kiss between Vince and Shelly. Indeed, the graphic representation of the open mouths and tongues ultimately evokes a feeling of repulsion. The onomatopoeia “hawlp” accompanies the act of vomiting, while Shelly meaningfully remains covered by vomit for the rest of the drive during which she is only able to mumble “Kak”.

Not only does the scene deconstruct the expectations regarding one of underground clichés, but it uses aesthetic disgust to convey an axiological value to heroin addiction as repulsive as well as to ethically judge the characters of the story. In fact, while this revulsive scene takes place, Vince and Lenny carry out a conversation about the latter’s smuggling operation.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the moral disgust generated by Lenny’s disrespect of corpses matches the overall representation of the heavy drugs world as something degenerate.

In translation, the dialogue between Lenny and Vince undergoes several modifications. For example, on the same page, in the balloon in which Lenny describes his drug trade, the Italian version is expanded with the final remark «Niente male come bisness!» (i.e., the lexicalised pronunciation of the loanword “business”), to which in the following page Vince responds «Direi anch’io!».

In this case, the positive comments about the smuggling operation arguably convey the translators’ ironic remarks, as no corresponding utterance is present in the original. Another element to notice is the choice to keep the original “yeah” (on panel 5 «Oh yeah?» and «Yeah...»), which in Italian is somehow connoted with a euphoric state (enthusiasm, satisfaction). By contrast, with the exception of the exclamation «God damn Lenny! Thass some good shit!» (translated: «Mapporcodio, Lenny! Che razza di roba!!!»; «God [is a] pig! Lenny! What’s this stuff!»), as heroin has effect, Vince plunges into a state of complete emotionless aporia. He vaguely answers to Lenny’s recount («..yeah...dead..uh, I dunno nothin’ Lenny...Just get me some ‘o that shit!») / «Sssi... morto... beh, non so... non voglio saperne niente,

<sup>40</sup> This is another clear reference to real-life events, or, better, said to a real-life urban legend spread at that time, i.e., the so-called Cadaver Connection, a heroin smuggling operation with drug hidden in the American soldiers’ coffins, which involved the Harlem drug smuggler Frank Lucas and the U.S. Army sergeant Ike Atkinson. The relationship between Frank Lucas and “Seargent Smack” Atkinson had great resonance in popular culture and even inspired the film *American Gangster* (2007).

Lenny! Fammi solo avere la roba»). His sole concern is getting more heroin and only back home he manages to doubt Lenny's actions: «Whew...Lenny's sure getting weird...» (Cazzo, anche Lenny...ne ha fatta di strada...»; «Fuck! Lenny too...He's come long way...»). In translation, these passages are considerably distorted.

On the one hand, the level of verbal violence in Italian is increased, even adding a blasphemous exclamation: e.g., “God damn” is translated as “Mapporcoddio” in the first excerpt and “cazzo” is added in the third excerpt (likewise, on page 11 “man” is translated as “boiaddio”; “god [is an] executioner”). On the other hand, rather than rendering the state of aphoria, in the second excerpt, modality is changed from “not-knowing” to “not-wanting-to-know” and, in the third, another positive evaluation of Lenny as a successful man (“ne ha fatta di strada”) replaces the comment about his weirdness.

This addition is at odds with the axiological value assigned to the heroin world in the original and partakes in a general reframing of the story as one of sex, violence (both physical and verbal) and drugs in a rather magnified sense.

Indeed, the increase of verbal violence combines with the magnification of the isotopy /sex/: when Lenny greets Vince for the first time after his return, he claims: «Holy Shit... It's Vince! How ya doin' man? How was th'Nam? Shit, man... you look wasted!» (UE, p. 8), which is translated as «Santa merda! Ma è Vince! Come va, sbarbo? Cos'hai fatto giù nel Viet-nam? Le hai scopate le gialle? 'Azzo che cera di merda che hai!» («Holy Shit! It's Vince! How are you, smooth-shaven guy? What did you do down to Vietnam? Did you fuck some yellow ones?»; UI, p. 8). In the textual expansion “Le hai scopate le gialle?”, the verb “scopare” adds the classeme /sex/ which is absent in the original. The verbal choice is rather vulgar, in accordance to Lenny's overall idiolect, and combines with the appellative “gialle” to refer to Vietnamese women with a racist, all the more, vulgar undertone.

Few pages later (UE/UI, p. 11), before robbing the bank, Vince's ski mask reminds him of a weekend with Shelly on the Big Baldy Mountain (“Man.. this old ski mask brings me back some fine memories..that weekend with Shelly up on the Big Baldy..»). The Italian translation is: «Boiaddio... 'sta vecchia cuffia da sci...quanti ricordi, quella gita in montagna con Shelly...il caminetto acceso...I suoi pompini...» («God [is an] executioner...this old ski cap...so many memories, that trip on the mountain with Shelly... the blazing fire... Her blowjobs...»). While omitting the toponym, the Italian version is expanded with the addition of: «...il caminetto acceso...I suoi pompini...», the term “pompini” (“blowjobs”) further reiterating the classeme /sex/. The translators likely added their own interpretation of “fine memories”, charging them with the cozy atmosphere of the fireplace and an overt sexual connotation. What is preserved is the creation of a euphoric memory based on joy in the original and lust in translation. The aim of such additions may be to interpret the story according to a more light-hearted, slapstick frame with sexual innuendos and humorous interruptions to dysphoria and dramatic crescendos – a tendency which is taken to the extremes in the second story, where the isotopy /sex/ plays a crucial role. As for this story, however, it is interesting to notice that the isotopy /sex/ is only present in the sequence in the car but becomes dominant in the Italian version by orienting two particular scenes: the encounter with Vince's friends and the moment prior to the robbery.

Even in this passage, the sexual reference combines with the addition of a blasphemous “Boiaddio”, which adds the isotopy /religion/ to the translated text. No blasphemous undertone is present in the original, which is not framed within an overtly anticlerical stance. Such stance belongs exclusively to the Italian translation.

In the last pages of the story, Vince’s last euphoric memory paves the way for him to plunge into a dysphoric state and violence shifts from being relegated to the *débrayage* and dinner-table talks to being part of the narrative present. It is graphically represented on the scene as Vince’s hallucinations take the lead and he opens fire against the bank official and the civilians who, in his mind, are his Sergeant and a multitude of soldiers from the Vietnamese army. On a thymic level, this is the outburst of Vince’s dysphoric condition as its rage and resentment, which are no longer tamed by heroin, break out. Thus, Vince ironically becomes the embodiment of his father’s violent and racist attitude, venting his own negative passions by hurting what his mind constructs as enemies. This is consistent not only with his family’s mindset but also with his homeland’s rhetoric based on the myth of ‘good war’. By reframing his brutal actions as patriotic acts against a multitude of foreign invaders, he projects all his frustration onto imaginary scapegoats. In a very American way, he ultimately lets the consequent violent disruption replace any other attempt to critically face his own problems by means of self-analysis.

Visually, figures of weapons (belonging to Vince, the police as well as by the imaginary Vietnamese army) combine with piles of corpses to convey the isotopies /violence/ and /death/. Furthermore, several onomatopoeias are used to recreate the sound of the shots (bam, blam, fump, pop, fwut, phlut, fap, spat, pow, pimp).

On panel 3 of page 13 (UE/UI), an arrow with the writing «Token media violence» uses the violent scene of the shootout to jab with the CCA and the mainstream in general for their censorious attitude towards comics as promoters of violence. In translation, this passage is interpreted according to the Italian political frame and becomes «La violenza non è fuori, è nei fumetti!» («Violence is not outside, it’s in the comics!»). This is an implicit reference to the Years of Lead’s political unrest and terrorism climate, with the translators ironically reassuring their readers that violence occurs only in comics.

The isotopies /violence/ and /death/ also intertwine as the verb “kill” is repeated by Vince, balloon after balloon:

- Panel 1, p. 12 (UE/UI): This weapon has killed 120 women and children! / Quest’arma ha già ucciso 120 tra donne e bambini!
- Panel 2, p. 12 (UE/UI): What ya shakin’for, lady? I’m the boy you trained to kill! Aint ya proud of me? / Perché trema, signora? Non mi ha allenato lei a uccidere? Dovrebbe essere orgogliosa di me!
- Panel 1 and 2, p. 13 (UE/UI): Sergeant you goddam cocksucker you did this to me! I’m gonna kill you! /Sergente, lercio succhia-cazzi! Tu mi hai ridotto così! Ti accoppo!

The second and third passage also reveal how, on a passional level, resentment and revenge towards society as well as his Sergeant are the thymic state dominating Vince. In this respect, the Italian version adds “lercio” (“dirty”)



to the slur against the Sergeant, reiterating the isotopy /disgust/ with an axiological value.

Another modification in the Italian version is the slur referred to the imaginary Vietnamese army: «Fuckin'charlies! They've invaded America!» (YE/YI, p. 13) which becomes: «Maledette scimmie! Hanno invaso – gasp – l'America!», to which one of them responds «Die yankee dog!» («Muori, cane ienki!»). US soldiers referred to the Vietnamese communist forces as “Victor Charlie” or “Charlie”, which are both letters in the NATO phonetic alphabet, instead of Viet Cong. The Italian translators, possibly unaware of the military frame, were again guided by the isotopies of /bestiality/ and /savagery/ informing the dehumanisation of the opponent. Vince's discourse and, even more significantly, actions – in the end – materialise his father's violent, patriotic attitude. In this case, the opponent responds, both in English and Italian, by dehumanising the US veteran with the slur “dog”/“cane”. In Italian, this rhetorical device is preserved, though the pronunciation of “yankee” is lexicalised.

The carnage following this verbal exchange is interrupted by Vince's father (UE/UI, p. 14). Once again, the man proves to be an antagonistic character as he deceives Vince by pretending to feel sympathy for his sickness.

Fred's apparent compassion convinces Vince to surrender. However, in a last overturn of the thymic movement, this paves the way for a dysphoric condition of deception: by visually turning his back on his son, Vince's father authorises the police to kill him, closing the story with the claim: «I never did like that son of a bitch», which is preserved by the translation: «Non m'è mai piaciuto quell figlio di puttana!». This ultimate dysphoric act symbolises the deception of a generation, unfairly sent to die and then repudiated for its damages. In this frame, the story serves to help the readers formulate an ethical and axiological evaluation of ‘overground’ America, with the cartoonists graphically displaying the horrific truth behind the US value system.

### 3.2 TRIVIALISING FRAMES AND GENDER-BASED CONFLICT

In *You got a point there, pop!*, GI/TV once again build their narration upon the opposition between euphoric and dysphoric states, which, in this case, serve to stress the opposition between the two main characters. The story is set at the end of an imaginary war between men and women (the former «hold Europe and most of the eastern seaboard» and the latter «everything west of Chicago»), which is here embodied by the one-to-one combat between two lone enemies, Lem Peters and Ruth O'Leary. After a fighting sequence, Ruth manages to overpower Lem, who is stripped and tied to a tree, next to a bonfire. Noticing Lem's erection, Ruth initiates a sexual intercourse which culminates – in GI/TV's horror style – with her cutting off and eating his testicles, carving his chest and slicing his eyeballs.

On the very first panel above the title, GI/TV's cartoon alter-ego appears to introduce the story and dedicate it «[...] for all you Women's Libbers» (YE, p. 25), which is translated as «e 'sta storia la dedichiamo tutta a voi, femministe!» (YI, 71). The birth Women's Liberation Movement and the renegotiation of the role of women during the counterculture influenced underground comix and became object of several reflections and controver-

sies.<sup>41</sup> In particular, as detailed below, this story aims to overturn the recurring plot in which a black, savage woman initially fights and later becomes a sexual conquest of a white man.<sup>42</sup> The Italian translation adapts the original text by using a more generic sememe, “femministe”, which may thus comprise the Italian ones, while erasing the specific reference to the US Women’s Liberation Movement.

While contextualising the conflict between “men” and “ladies” (in Italian: “omi” and “siore”), Veitch’s alter-ego presents the characters as follows: «As our story opens, two lone enemies are about to meet on an isolated hilltop in Pittsburg». The Italian translation is: «La nostra storia s’inizia che due nemici sbandati sbattono l’una contro l’altro, sulla cima desolata di una collina nei pressi di Pittsburg... ale’ forza ragazzi!» («Our story begins itself with two lowlife enemies slamming one against the other, on a desolate hilltop near Pittsburg»). A first element to notice – which characterised the translation of the first story and becomes even more frequent in the present one – is the accentuation of a comic effect which is absent in the original, in this case by means of vernacular forms (“omi” and “siore” being typical forms of the Italian Northern dialects) and grammatical errors (e.g., the reflexive form in “La nostra storia s’inizia”). The translators also add the comment «Alè, forza ragazzi!» («Yay, come on guys!»), which may represent either an encouragement for both parties or more likely indicates the translator’s support for the ‘males’. In fact, they may have played around the ambiguous use of Italian universal masculine.

The translation of the sememe “lone” with “sbandati” (“lowlife”) re-frames the story according to a concept typical of the Italian counterculture. The same term is used in the following caption to refer to the female protagonist, Ruth O’Leary «of the fighting 51<sup>st</sup>» (YE, p. 25): «una sbandata del 51<sup>o</sup> rgt. ‘incazzate’» (YI, p. 71). By using the sememes “sbandata” and “sbandati”, the translator is adding a reference to the heterogeneous group of Italian mavericks within the Movimento del ‘77, from freaks to Lotta Armata supporters, who did not abide any political affiliation during the turbulent Seventies. In this story, the use of a term connected with this milieu is not a magnification per se. The loneliness of the two protagonists (fighting without their army) may have prompted the translators’ to re-frame the story as two characters with no political affiliation, fighting a lone war. The sememe “sbandati” is marginal with respect to the whole story. However, it suggests that the political frame influenced the Italian translator, permeating their cultural context.

By looking at the visual construction of the pages, the authors use images to graphically emphasise the opposition between the two. First of all, the gender-based conflict is expressed by the visual characterisation of Ruth as a female fighter, who is black, savage, almost naked (only a sash covers her lower body) and fights by using a saber as well as her whole body. By contrast, Lem is a well-trained white soldier, fully dressed and equipped with a rifle, a knife and a bullet belt.

<sup>41</sup> See TRINA ROBBINS, *Wimmin’s Studies*, in DANKY JAMES, KITCHEN DENIS (eds.), *Underground Classics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix*, New York, Harry N. Abrams/ComicArts 2009, pp. 32-34.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, ROBERT CRUMB, *Angelfood McDevilsfood in Backwater Blues*, «Home Grown Funnies», Vol. 1, Princeton, Kitchen Sink Press 1971; LARRY WELZ, *Captain Guts Meets Black Power*, «Captain Guts Comics», Vol. 2, San Francisco, The Print Mint 1973

In addition, the constant change of perspectives (e.g. on page 25 YE/71 YI, viewers look at Lem from Ruth's perspective, while, on the following, they look at Ruth from Lem's perspective) and the alternation of panels now showing Ruth defending herself from Lem's riddle, now Lem being hit by her kick (e.g., page 27 YE/73 YI) further emphasise the dichotomy. Power dynamics between the two are also emphasized by gaze direction, which is vertically constructed, with Ruth looking down at Lem and Lem, overpowered, looking up at her.

Skin colour is also used to stress the dichotomy between the two characters. In this respect, even the slurs they use to address each other are often race-based. Ruth calls Lem: "white boy" ("biancuzzo" and "bianchetto") and "whitey" ("bianchino"). Lem uses racial slurs such as "nigra meat" ("ciccia negra"), "black devil" ("diavolazza negra"). In translation, the repeated alterations of nouns with suffixes ("-uzzo"; "-etto"; "-ino"; "-azza") and the use of childish and jokingly-connoted words such as "ciccia" (a jokingly term to indicate "meat") weaken the overall tension of the conflict, thus creating an almost farcical dialogue instead of a pathematic crescendo leading to the tragic climax of the final pages. In this respect, the hermeneutic reading of dysphoric passions is crucial to construct the polarisation of the two protagonists.

As a «tigris and amazon», Ruth is first described as a character dominated by rage and aggressiveness, i.e., by instinctual, primitive passions which seem to guide her actions. In this respect, the sememes "tigris" and "amazon" used in the original both share the classeme /savagery/, with "amazon" in particular also conveying /fight/ and /fierceness/. In translation, "amazon" is left out and she is simply defined "tigris", the augmentative adding the classeme /big/ to that of /savagery/. The sememe, however, is far from conveying the original sense as in Italian such augmentative is used in a comical, overly erotic sense.

Moreover, the translators added that she belongs to the «51° rgt. incizzate». The addition of the sememe "incizzate" ("pissed off"), and thus the classeme /rage/, can be accounted for by the thymic construction of the character on a visual level: her rage and aggressiveness are emphasised by the tense posture and facial expression (her eyebrows pulled down and together, her eyes «heavy with man-hate», staring hard at Lem, her mouth open with gnashing teeth) that she shows in most panels.

Fire also symbolically represents her pathematic state. On page 29 (YE), it blazes in front of her, aggressively hurting her opponent. GI/TV play with black and white to create contrasts between light and shadow. Fire is the only source of light on this page, now illuminating Ruth's figure as she rises above Lem, now emphasising her dark outline which fearlessly opposes the flames.

Conversely, on the same page, the passion dominating the character of Lem is fear: he is graphically shown as he screams, naked and tied to a tree, begging for mercy, while the flames of Ruth's bonfire get close to his genitals and hit his face, and the onomatopoeia "EEAAGH" elevates in capital letters, with a quivering font on the top of his head as he is burnt. Since the beginning, the character supposed to embody the Land of the Brave, is presented as "scared". Fear is thus the first passion defining him, though he appeals to reason to reassure himself about the "safe, victorious" outcomes of war. Even the narrators mock him by evoking the passion of worry: «[...] there's no need to worry, is there Lem?» (YE, p. 26). The translators preserve the reference to fear by using "spaventato" ("scared"), whereas the ironical question

tag is rendered as an affirmative utterance, suspended between ellipses: «... non c'è proprio da preoccuparsi...» (YI, p. 72; «...there's really nothing to worry about...»).

Surprisingly, the crescendo of rage and fear of the first pages is interrupted by an apparent moment of euphoria. On page 30 (YE), the sequence of panels opens with Ruth extinguishing the fire with her bare foot and Lem smiling at her with gratitude. The central image, saliently positioned in the most prominent position and with a larger size, shows Lem's figure framed between the shadow of Ruth's legs and bottom, which form a sort of triangle: his facial expression suggests a mix of fear and uncertainty as he cannot conceal his visible erection. In the bottom panel, the close-up to Ruth's angry face seems to anticipate a violent act. However, turning the page, readers are confronted with a kinder version of Ruth, her face being calm and reassuring as she begins to touch Lem's penis and prepares for a penetrative act. The use of a splash page, overlapped only by a small panel, slows down the rhythm of the story, suspending the sequence of action and dysphoria to give room to a positive state of euphoria. Lust opposes to the violent passions of the previous pages and even Ruth's words show unexpected comprehension towards her opponent: «Whitey, I know you're young and you're fighting this war just 'cause some old men told you to...» (YE, p. 31) (Lo so, sai, bianchino? Sei giovane, e so che combattì questa Guerra solo perchè qualche vecchione t'ha obbligato...», p. 77). Again, by using the cartoonish augmentatives “bianchino” and “vecchione” the translation weakens the pathos of the scene as Ruth's speech does not match the original characterisation and adds a trivial, comic register into a sequence of lust and intimacy which is essential to the subsequent plot twist.

Lust and comprehension, in fact, reveal to be a hoax as she continues: «but that's no excuse for diggin' my black ass!» (YE, p.32). Her facial expression quickly displays all of her anger as she reveals a knife hidden behind her back. The narrative rhythm accelerates in the following pages and in a sequence of close-ups she is seen stabbing and emasculating Lem. On the last page (YE, p. 35), the comics grid is composed of two panels: the first shows Lem's unrecognizable body, horribly disfigured, his eyes being carved out, streams of blood pouring out of his wounds, and his mouth wide open. The narrators claim that «Lem felt himself die there in the moonlight. His last impression was the smell of frying grease from his own inwards... he heard the smack of thick lips and the clunk of steel fork against iron frying pan...». In this respect, as death comes, his senses fade away and aphoria replaces the fear carved over his disfigured face, now resembling a screaming skull. On the other hand, in the final panel, Ruth tastes the testicles but preserves the angry face that characterises her.

By mixing Eros and Thanatos, GI/TV overturn the clichéd storyline of several comix in which the black woman is represented as savage and fierce, but is ultimately tamed by the white man, generally by means of a sexual intercourse. On a thymic level, this type of stories relies on the alternation between an apparently dysphoric condition (rage and fury) and an ultimately euphoric state (lust and fun). GI/TV play with their readers' expectations in this respect and add another plot twist as the female protagonist is faking her euphoria and the story ultimately plunges into dysphoria, described in gruesome detail. Moreover, Ruth's rage reveals to be far from irrational, primitive and savage as her actions are based on a reasoned and premeditated act of revenge against sexist crimes. In this sense, GI/TV's use of thymic conditions

is functional to convey their endogenous criticism towards certain deviations of the underground comix phenomenon, which privilege flippant humour and stereotypical storylines grounded upon ‘overground’ values in order to appeal a wider public.

Ruth’s cannibalising act is also accompanied by a speech mixing feminist and Freudian thought by using an elevated register and subject-specific jargon:

- A. Panel 2, p. 31 (YE); p. 77 (YI): I know you’re young and you’re fighting this war just ‘cause some old men told you to.../ Sei giovane, e so che combatti questa Guerra solo perchè qualche vecchione t’ha obbligato...
- B. Panel 3, p. 32 (YE); p. 78 (YI): The root of the physical struggle between the sexes lies in the sexism and ideological supremism of the masculine ego!/Una volta finita sta guerra, sareste ancora lì a sbavare per le nostre spacche, e saremmo ancora nella vecchia merda di sempre! («Once this war is over, you would still be there drooling over our snatches and we would still be in the same old shit!»)
- C. Panel 2, p. 33 (YE); p. 79 (YI):...and when it’s all over my sisters are going to run this planet!/ ...così, molto meglio per noi non averci tra i piedi, quando tutto il mondo sarà nostro! («...so, it’s much better if you are not in our way when the whole world will be ours!»)
- D. Panel 3, p. 33 (YE); p. 79 (YI): Until that day comes, no man will take his satisfaction with a woman!/ E fino a quel giorno, nessun maschio sonderà buchi di donna! («And until that day, no male will probe a woman’s holes!»)
- E. Panel 4, p. 33 (YE); p. 79 (YI): Can you dig it, big man?/ Capisci, cazzo? («Do you understand, big prick?»)

The original text touches different key-notions on the debate developed within the counterculture, especially in the light of the Women’s Liberation Movement’s claims: the generation gap (“young” vs “old men”), “sexism” and the “ideological supremism of masculine ego”.

Not so surprisingly, the translation completely overturns the original message and modifies Ruth’s speech by silencing all the references to social, political and psychoanalytical frames, resulting in the erasure of its complex, intellectual import. The Italian text downplays her speech into a coarse tirade: the generational conflict is reduced to “qualche vecchione t’ha obbligato” (Example A; again, using the aforementioned augmentative with comical undertones); sexism and the reference to men taking their satisfaction with women to “sbavare per le nostre spacche” (Example B) and “nessun maschio sonderà buchi di donna” (Example D); the very crucial reference to sisterhood is erased, while those to ideological supremism and male ego are replaced by a banal lamentation: “saremmo ancora nella vecchia merda di sempre” (Example B); the ironic epithet “big man” as Ruth overpowers and emasculates Lem is turned into the sexual slur “cazzo” (Example E), with another aug-



mentative form. The speech no longer reflects the Libbers' thought and is rather the expression of a hard-to-die male chauvinism, which places more emphasis on the subject of sex than on any cultural or ideological contents.

The adoption of this banalising frame is clearly problematic as it results in a censorious act towards Ruth's character and the overall sense. Her identity and the almost academic contents of her message were erased as the translators arguably disregarded their significance, privileging a more reassuring and familiar reading.

The recurrence of the isotopy/*sex*/, which occupies a hierarchically dominant position together with */violence/* and */death/*, may have prompted the verbal manipulation of the original materials, demoting an intersectional reflection of a black woman against white, male power and abuse to a series of line reiterating chauvinist stereotypes which are closer to the "commedia sexy all'italiana" frame than to the Us counterculture.

Several visual elements described above partake in the isotopy */sex/*, which, in the original, serves to construct the hoax about the sensual, wild black woman that the white man will ultimately tame.

On a verbal level, the isotopy is reiterated by the narrators' emphasis on Ruth's breast: "bare-breasted" (YE, p. 25) and "breasts of bronze glistening with sweat in the moonlight" (YE, p. 29). In addition, Ruth frequently uses sexually-connoted nicknames primarily meant to insult Lem, such as Mr. Porkdog, Pigman, and Mr. Pigs, and her discourse abounds with references to sexuality in a way which is ever associated with pleasure but only with imposition: for instance, «...but that's no excuse for diggin' my black ass!» (YE; p.33), «Until that day comes, no man will take his satisfaction with a woman!» (YE, p. 34).

Even in this passages, «Cannibale»'s cartoonists exaggerate sexual references and sexist slurs in their textual manipulation. For instance, "rebel forces" (YE, p. 25) becomes "fighe ribelli" (YI, p. 71; "rebel snatches"); "her abdomen" (YE, p. 27) is expanded in the phrase "il nero, lucido, morbido ventre" (YI, p. 73; "the black, shiny, soft belly"); "wimmins" (YE, p. 27) is rendered with a derogatory "femministe troie" (YI, p. 73; "feminist whores"); "Breasts of bronze glistening with sweat in the moonlight, her eyes heavy with man-hate" (YE, p. 29) becomes "Mammelle di bronzo, lucide di sudore rispondono al fuoco...I pesanti capezzoloni sono occhi che fissano Lem con odio" (YI, p. 7; "Breasts of bronze glistening with sweat at the firesite...the big heavy nipples are eyes looking at Lem with hate": in this case, fire being the only source of light in the panel, the translators were likely drawn by the image in the choice to replace moonlight with "fuoco"); on the same page, "her camp" is expanded in "accampamento di quella furia nera" ("that black fury's camp"), adding a reference to her rage and her skin-color.

«Cannibale»'s translators also seem hypnotised by images and lingers in the description of visual elements (her breast, abdomen, nipples, skin, the enraged attitude conveyed of facial expressions on a proxemic level). Likewise, verbal violence in Lem's balloon ("femministe troie") is increased as the translators are actually rendering the physical violence depicted in the image (i.e., Lem menacing Ruth with a shotgun) into words. Ruth's epithets are translated as: "Mr. Porkdog"/"mister cazzo" ("mister dick") and "Mr. Pigs"/"maialotto" ("piggy"). "Pigman" is not translated but the epithet "Uccellone" ("big prick") is added to the balloon of the subsequent panel. As in the previous examples, the use of the augmentative suffix "-one" introduces a wrong register which degrades the pathematic emphasis. Indeed, this is the

passage in which Ruth reveals to be far from a savage, as she is not blinded by rage but rather moved by a cold-blooded desire of revenge. However, the translators' attention was rather captured by the image of Lem's penis, in salient position, and thus opted for the addition of a sexually-based slapstick element.

In the face of the highbrow original frames, «Cannibale»'s translators rather seem to prefer a register and a style that evoke echoes of the “*commedia sexy all'italiana*”, a popular Italian film genre of the Seventies and Eighties that relied on abundant female nudity, infantilised representations of sexuality, clichéd male-centred storylines, flippant humour based on sexual innuendos and slapstick elements. In parallel with this filmic tradition, a whole tradition of Italian erotic and pornographic comics developed during the 1970s, with such titles as *Lando* (1973-1984), *Il Tromba* (1975-1986) by Edifumetti and *Il Montatore* (1975-1982) by Ediperiodici. These comics were not conceived as satirical works in the first place and were not so much connected with the underground experience, as they rather aimed to transpose the *commedia sexy* style in the comics format. Given their chronological and topographic proximity, «Cannibale»'s cartoonists may have been influenced by and imbued in this type of male-chauvinist comedy inasmuch as their translation fully embraces the rhetoric and register of these publications. This hypothesis may account for the massive use of exaggerations and augmentatives as well as to the addition of slapstick elements, to the detriment of the original countercultural specificities and message.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS: ON *CANNIBAL* TRANSLATIONS AND *DEVIANT* FRAMES

The semiotic analysis GI/TV's comix and their Italian versions revealed that the adoption of different hermeneutic frames and the misreading of thymic dynamics affected the process of translation of these works. «Cannibale»'s translators faced the difficult task of decoding and re-coding two narrations with a satirical purpose that were deeply imbued in the spirit of US 1970s and its frames. These are inherently different from the Italian ones, despite the evident affinity «Cannibale»'s authors felt towards US underground cartoonists. In fact, the immediate, impulsive as well as political closeness between the two experiences and the relative 'missions' should not lead one to turn a blind eye on the social and cultural differences and disregard the necessity to translate these texts according to frames potentially equivalent to those of the original.

GI/TV's comix can be fully understood only by grasping the criticism towards both the US value system and certain stereotypes and clichés unjustly linked to the underground world as well. This is the case of generational conflict, anti-militarist criticism, the debunking of the sex-drugs myth, and the satire against white male «sexism and ideological supremism». In the stories discussed as a case-study, a concatenation of dominant isotopies linked to violence, sex and, ultimately, death, guide the reading of the stories up to their tragic epilogues. On a narrative level, these combines with an alternation of euphoric and dysphoric thymic states, which are charged with an axiological value by the authors and serve to convey their political message.

Passions are defined positive or negative depending on axiological evaluations which change according to cultural forms as well as historical periods –

what Bertrand called connotative taxonomies.<sup>43</sup> For example, in the case of US underground comix, passions linked to sexuality have an axiological and political value which depends on the stigma and taboo towards sex within the US society. GI/TV knew that sexual contents were capable of generating both discomfort and prurient curiosity and played with both of these conditions. Sex was used to create expectations of illusory euphoria, only to surprise their readers by plunging into dysphoric passions linked to disgust, violence and death.

Moreover, by using the viewpoint of marginalised subjects (the disabled, mentally ill and addicted veteran and the black woman opposing white male power) and unveiling the ethically deplorable position of their antagonists (the father figure and the white male soldier, respectively), GI/TV's comix tackled important social issues which were at the core of the countercultural discourse, such as the intersectional debate about gender and race.

However, «Cannibale»'s translations often reinterpreted the axiological values of these stories, which were re-framed according to apparently more trivial clichés and textual simplifications that may be either unaccounted for or meant to accommodate a higher amount of readers by involving the less knowledgeable ones. In the Italian translations, inexperience may account for seemingly banalising choices. However, it is worth stressing that philological accuracy was not a goal for these translators who rather aimed at voicing ideological proximity and a similarly subversive spirit. In this respect, even the philological infidelity of the translated texts may thus be part of an attempt by «Cannibale»'s cartoonists to render the excess and desecrating nature of the original comix by adapting it to the Italian context.

This entails the emphasis on coarseness and flippant humor, on blasphemy and sexual provocation. This does not mean that the translation is eschewing a political, militant purpose by downplaying the American issues and their almost academic content and by adapting them to Italian and sometimes populist frames. For example, endogenous criticism to the Italian political system is added by referring to the «sbandati» as a radical fringe of 'Movimento del '77' or by claiming ironically that «La violenza non è fuori, è nei fumetti!» in translating «Token media violence» (UE/UI, p. 13). Likewise, the anticlerical position of «Cannibale»'s cartoonists shines through the addition of blasphemous accents to the translations. Indeed, given the asphyxiating presence of the Catholic Church in Italian culture, the translators could not resist the temptation to mock deity by using blasphemies and coupling what is sacred with profanity. Blasphemy, in this sense, was part of their counter-culture as well as of the frame through which they looked at texts they perceived in close ideological proximity, regardless of the actual presence of religious isotopies. As such, in conclusion, «Cannibale»'s translations, which aimed to voice the message of their overseas comrades, ultimately told much more about the spirit of the Italian underground milieu, its frames of references and sensibility.

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<sup>43</sup> DENIS BERTRAND, *Precis de semiotique litteraire*, p. 254.

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Isotopy; Comics Studies; Translation; Multimodality



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