

Cultures on the Screens: Family, Identity, Gender, and Language in Television Series



EUT

edited by
Leonardo Buonomo
Piergiorgio Trevisan

UPI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS ITALIANE

Opera sottoposta a peer review secondo il
protocollo UPI – University Press Italiane

Impaginazione
Elisa Widmar

© copyright Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste 2022

Proprietà letteraria riservata.

I diritti di traduzione, memorizzazione elettronica, di
riproduzione e di adattamento totale e parziale di questa
pubblicazione, con qualsiasi mezzo (compresi i microfilm,
le fotocopie e altro) sono riservati per tutti i paesi.

ISBN 978-88-5511-370-0 (print)
ISBN 978-88-5511-371-7 (online)

EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste
via Weiss 21 – 34128 Trieste
<http://eut.units.it>
<https://www.facebook.com/EUTEdizioniUniversitaTrieste>

Cultures on the Screens: Family, Identity, Gender, and Language in Television Series

edited by
Leonardo Buonomo
Piergiorgio Trevisan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank most sincerely our colleague and friend *Sergia Adamo*, without whose contribution the conference out of which this volume originated would not have been possible. In addition, we would be remiss if we did not single out, among those who made the conference a success, *Gianna Fusco* and *Bianca Del Villano*, whose expertise on TV series was much appreciated by attending scholars and students alike. We were very fortunate in securing the beautiful “*Stazione Rogers*” cultural centre as the venue for our conference and to benefit from the generous and unfailing assistance of the centre’s coordinator, *Laura Forcessini*. We are also deeply grateful to the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste and its chair, *Elisabetta Vezzosi*, for their continuous support and encouragement. Finally, we wish to express our most heartfelt gratitude to *Gabrielle Barfoot* for her invaluable contribution to the editing of this volume.

Contents

- IX Introduction
LEONARDO BUONOMO
PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN
- 1 From Russia with _____: Disguise, Performance, and Family Dynamics in *The Americans*
LEONARDO BUONOMO
- 17 *The Affair*: Authorship and Melodrama in Complex TV
VINCENZO MAGGITTI
- 39 The English Influence on Dubbed TV Series: The Case of *Modern Family*
VINCENZA MINUTELLA
- 69 “Just the facts, ma’am”: Class, Masculinity and Family Representations in Jack Webb’s *Dragnet*
ANTONIO DI VILIO
- 91 “You don’t know nothing about being me”: Ideology and Characterisation in *When They See Us*
PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN
- 121 Index
- 131 Contributors

Introduction

LEONARDO BUONOMO
PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN

Even though the study of television fiction emerged as a relevant field of study in the 1970s (Stedman; Newcomb; Adler and Cater), it is especially in the last three decades that attention has increasingly focused on TV series as a sophisticated form of expression and a fertile ground for research into the cultural dynamics that govern the representation of cultural identity, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and the use of language (Jones; Miller; Creeber; Hammond and Mazdon; Mittell; Bianculli). There can be little doubt that this surge in critical interest came in response to the new generation of series, such as *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, that broke new ground from the 1990s onwards in terms of aesthetics, production values, narrative complexity, and subject matter. With the advent of cable and, more recently, streaming services and other alternatives to traditional network channels, not only have TV series been freed, at least in part, from the shackles of censorship, but they have also provided creators and show runners with a flexible vehicle which encompasses different formats and communication strategies. This has resulted in a rich, enormously varied offering of television products which often partake of, and straddle across, different genres: drama, comedy, fantasy, reality television, etc. It is

increasingly rare to find television dramas that do not incorporate elements of comedy and soap opera, or comedies that don't occasionally swerve into drama.

Like the great serial literature of the nineteenth century which they often draw upon or evoke, TV series simultaneously entertain and hold up a mirror to society, providing invaluable insight into political and social issues, re-examining history, inviting reflections on gender and generational issues, and delving deep into the human condition. Often characterized by a high degree of intertextuality, TV series mix high and low – classic literature, drama, and movies, with pop culture (songs, comics, etc.) – thus speaking a hybrid language which transcends national borders. TV series have been for some time a truly global phenomenon. While English-language (especially American) productions continue to dominate the international market, the menu of streaming services such as *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime* has become increasingly diverse, introducing large audiences all over the world to series written in languages other than English (as demonstrated by the astounding global success of the South Korean series *Squid Game*).

At the same time, however, much can be understood about specific countries and cultural contexts, by studying the evolution of their television offerings. One could mention, for example, the educational “mission” which was at the basis of several literary adaptations produced for European public broadcasting companies such as the BBC and RAI, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, or the idealized, suburban domestic comedies that dominated American small screens during the Eisenhower era.

Over the last three decades, the study of TV series has also attracted the interest of linguists from different traditions: as a consequence, aspects like “multimodal characterization” (Toolan; Bednarek 2010), “genre and performance” (Paltridge, Thomas, and Liu), “mind style” (Montoro) and “ideology” (Bednarek 2011), to quote but a few, have been widely investigated starting from the language patterns characterizing characters' dialogues.

Indeed, while TV shows are rarely *about* language (in fact, few media products ever are), language itself always plays a crucial role in sustaining the general settings, the internal consistency of the characters and the unfolding of both the broad and the narrow narrative arcs (Queen 2). This potential of language can be ascribed primarily to what linguists

call ‘variation’, i.e. alternative ways of using grammar, of pronouncing sounds, of structuring conversations, and of selecting particular words over others. In gender representation, for example, stereotypical roles are heavily dependent on the different way in which language is used by different characters: specific patterns may be used only by females, while others may be exclusively employed by male figures. This, of course, can result in an extreme polarisation of gender roles, which then may become ‘naturalised’ and ‘common sense’ for viewers. It goes without saying that the stereotypical representation of different ethnicities is construed by using language variation in analogous ways.

In the last 10-15 years, linguistic studies of TV shows have also benefited from so-called ‘corpus methods’, i.e. computer programs that make it possible to collect and analyse millions of words at the same time (e.g. all the words pronounced by a specific character over all the seasons of a show, for example), thus allowing researchers to quantitatively identify recurrent linguistic patterns that are indicative of particular aspects. The use of corpus techniques could also prove crucial for the creation of learning materials aimed at the development of ‘televisual literacy’ both for University and for Secondary school students.

The present collection originates from a research project, financed by the Department of Humanities of the University of Trieste, whose findings were first shared and debated with scholars from other Italian academic institutions, as well as students and the general public, in the course of a two-day conference held at the “Stazione Rogers” in Trieste, on 15-16 October, 2021. It presents, in amply revised and expanded form, papers which were first presented in that venue and which are representative of a variety of approaches to the study of TV series. The opening essay, by Leonardo Buonomo, places the highly acclaimed American drama series *The Americans* (2013-2018), created by Joe Wiseberg (a former CIA agent), in the context of the representation of family dynamics, a staple of American mass entertainment since the very beginnings of television programming. The essay argues that under the guise of a fact-based spy thriller, involving two Russian agents who pose as a typically American middle-class married couple with children during the Reagan era, *The Americans* offers an insightful and probing look into suburban American mores, consumerism, gender relations, parental responsibility, and generational conflict.

Questions of gender and marital conflict are also center stage in *The Affair* (2014-2019), created by Hagai Levi and Sarah Treem, which Vincenzo Maggitti in his essay sees as part of the glorious tradition of melodrama. Fully representative of the recent generation of television drama, characterized by high-quality production values, carefully honed writing, visually ambitious directing, and impeccable casting, *The Affair* exemplifies what has been appropriately called “complex TV”. Focusing on the series’ pilot, Maggitti shows how the tropes and traits that identify *The Affair* as melodrama are firmly established from the very outset of the story, thus setting the tone for what follows in the overall narrative arc of the series.

The focus on gender, family, and class representations continues in the next essay of this volume, by Antonio Di Vilio, which takes as its case study an apparently unlikely candidate, namely the police procedural *Dragnet* (1951-1959), created by Jack Webb. Tracing its origins from radio to television, and highlighting its connections with the Hollywood noir tradition in film, Di Vilio’s essay uncovers and analyses *Dragnet*’s political, social and gender ideology, with particular attention to its treatment and depiction of American masculinity.

In his paper, Piergiorgio Trevisan uses a range of linguistic and multimodal approaches to show how the *Us versus Them* polarisation between the White and the Black population is construed in the American TV show *When They See Us* (2019). Starting from the contribution of linguistic and visual choices at the level of paratext, Trevisan then moves to analysing how the representation of the black characters heavily relies on trite stereotypes about food, sport and music. A key role in this polarisation is played by language variation, which also explains why the white characters struggle to make sense of some colloquial expressions used by the black group, ultimately misunderstanding their meaning.

Vincenza Minutella’s paper starts from the assumption that American TV series dubbed into Italian can exert a great cultural and linguistic impact on young audiences, who often mimic the way their favourite TV characters behave and speak. Ultimately, this can produce changes in the way Italian is spoken by Italian themselves. In order to collect evidence of this phenomenon, Minutella analyses a corpus of television dialogue consisting of 10 episodes from the world-renowned TV series *Modern Family* (2009-2020). By comparing the original version in English and

the correspondent dubbed one in Italian, she takes into consideration a number of Anglicism that are generally associated with *dubbese*, i.e. the specific language variety of dubbing.

WORKS CITED

- Adler, Richard, and Douglass Cater, editors. *Television as a Cultural Force*. New York: Praeger, 1976.
- Bednarek, Monika. *The Language of Fictional Television: Drama and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Bednarek, Monika. "The Stability of the Televisual Character: A Corpus Stylistic Case Study". *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Ed. Roberta Piazza, Monika Bednarek and Fabio Rossi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. 185-204.
- Bianculli, David. *The Platinum Age of Television: From I Love Lucy to The Walking Dead, How TV Became Terrific*. New York: Doubleday, 2016.
- Creeber, Glen. *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*. London: BFI Publishing, 2004.
- Hammond, Michael, and Lucy Mazdon. *The Contemporary Television Series*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.
- Jones, Gerald. *Honey, I'm Home! Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Miller, Toby, editor. *Television Studies*. London: BFI Publishing, 2002.
- Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Montoro, Rocío. "A Multimodal Approach to Mind Style: Semiotic Metaphor vs. Multimodal Conceptual Metaphor". *Narrative and Multimodality: New Perspectives and Practices*. Ed. Ruth Page. London: Routledge, 2010. 31-49.
- Newcomb, Horace. *TV: The Most Popular Art*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974.
- Paltridge, Brian, Angela Thomas, and Richard Liu. "Genre, Performance and *Sex and the City*". *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Ed. Roberta Piazza, Monika Bednarek and Fabio Rossi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. 249-262.
- Queen, Robin. *Vox Popular: The Surprising Life of Language in the Media*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
- Stedman, Raymond William. *The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Installment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

Toolan, Michael. "I Don't Know What They're Saying Half the Time, but I'm Hooked on the Series: Incomprehensible Dialogue and Integrated Multimodal Characterisation in *The Wire*". *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Ed. Roberta Piazza, Monika Bednarek and Fabio Rossi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. 161-83.

From Russia with _____: Disguise, Performance, and Family Dynamics in *The Americans*

LEONARDO BUONOMO

Television portrayals of domestic interiors, marriage, parent-children and sibling relations, constitute, as William Douglas has aptly put it, “a public history of the family” (12). In the case of American television, that history is nearly as old as the medium itself, for representations of the family, whether in the form of sketches, comedy, or drama, were prominent from the very beginning. Even though the American television landscape, and with it the way television shows are watched, has changed enormously over the years, the family continues to be a major source of inspiration for show creators, as witnessed, for example, by the success of such currently running series as *Ozark* and *Succession*.¹ The use of the continuing narrative line of the soap opera which, since gaining prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, has become a staple of quality drama series, has proved particularly suited to the representation of family dynamics. As Glen Creeber has noted, “the ‘soap opera’ conventions that typify such narratives may actually offer a more complex means by which the intricacies and personal ambiguity of contemporary life... can be dramatized

¹ In addition, one could argue that for all its fantasy trappings, the phenomenally popular series *Game of Thrones* is, at its core, an exploration of family relations.

for a more self-knowing and self-reflexive audience” (3). This essay intends to highlight the ways in which, even within the long and varied history of television families, the drama series *The Americans* stands out. It contends that this series offers a valuable insight into the ongoing debate on what is still regarded as the basic unit of society, as well as into gender relations and the intersection of private and public spheres.

Created by Joe Weisberg, former CIA agent turned novelist (*An Ordinary Spy*, 2007) and showrunner, *The Americans* is a drama series which ran on the American FX cable channel for six seasons, from 2013 to 2018. Although it never garnered massive ratings, it gradually earned the devotion of loyal viewers both in the United States and internationally and won considerable acclaim from critics and the television industry. Remarkably, *The Americans* was twice the recipient (in 2014 and 2018) of the prestigious Peabody Award, which traditionally singles out television shows for the excellence of their writing. Set in the 1980s, *The Americans* revolves around two Soviet KGB agents who, after years of exceptionally rigorous training, have acquired the ability to pass as Americans. When we meet them in the first season, set in 1981, they have been living in the United States for fifteen years under the names of Philip and Elizabeth Jennings. Their meticulously constructed public image is that of an attractive, happily married middle-class couple running a travel agency and living in a comfortable house in Falls Church, Virginia (a suburb of Washington D.C.) with their children Paige (age 13) and Henry (age 9). What their neighbours, acquaintances, employees and, crucially, their own children, don't know is that Elizabeth and Philip (whose real names are Nadezhda and Mikhail) lead a double life as spies for the Soviet Union, as part of which they routinely have recourse to deception, disguise, blackmail, seduction, violence, and murder. While it might appear far-fetched, the premise of the series – Philip and Elizabeth's perfect impersonation of a typical American couple – is actually based, at least in part, on real-life events. In 2010 several Russian “sleeper agents” were arrested in the United States and later exchanged for American citizens detained in Russia.² What, at the time, made the story sensational was the realization that the spies had been living in the United

² The case was widely covered by the American media. The title of Manny Fernandez and Fernanda Santos' piece in the *New York Times* on June 29, 2010 – “Couples Accused as Spies Were the Suburbs Personified” – perfectly captures the disbelief that many Americans experienced when the news broke.

States for decades, successfully passing as Americans. Some of them were married and had children, born in the United States, who were unaware of their parents' real identities. However, given the status of US-Russian relations in 2010, several years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the discovery of the spy cell was not perceived by American public opinion as an existential threat. This is one of the main reasons why Joe Weisberg, while taking inspiration from the spy scandal of 2010 for *The Americans*, decided to set the series in the early eighties when, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, there was a heightening of Cold War tension. A master communicator, Reagan famously configured the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in stark moral terms, calling the communist superpower "the empire of evil".³ Undoubtedly, in *The Americans* the plan set in motion by the KGB under the name of "Directorate S" does sound diabolically clever. So much so, that even within the FBI there is initially a certain degree of scepticism. FBI agent Chris Amador seems to voice widespread incredulity when he scoffingly assesses the potentially explosive information about invisible Soviet agents in the United States: "Super-secret spies living next door. They look like us, they speak better English than we do. According to Timoshev [a KGB defector], they're not allowed to say a single word in Russian once they get here. I mean, come on, someone's been reading too many spy novels" (Season 1, pilot).

There is no doubt that in the volatile, fiercely contentious context of the 1980s the stakes for Elizabeth and Philip, and by extension for those they serve and those they seek to undermine, are vastly higher than for their real-life counterparts in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The period in which Weisberg's fictional spies operate includes such major crises as the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the tenure of four leaders of the Soviet Union in a relatively short span of time: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Kostantin Chernenko, and Mikhail Gorbachev. Astutely, Weisberg locates his narrative of ultra-sophisticated secrecy and dissimulation in a climate of exacerbated suspicion and menace in

³ President Reagan delivered what came to be known as the "Empire of Evil speech" on March 8, 1983, during a meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. Interestingly, in an effort to appeal to his religious-minded audience, Reagan denounced the attack that, in his view, secularism was waging against parental control over children by promoting unsupervised access to contraception. It is also worth noticing that, by labelling the Soviet Union as "evil", Reagan was resuming a rhetorical strategy he had first deployed in the 1950s (Rowland and Jones 445-47).

the United States which echoes the so-called red scare of the 1950s. By telling the story of Soviet spies who are indistinguishable from ordinary Americans, Weisberg and his collaborators evoke the paranoia-charged atmosphere of that era, when the fear of ideological infiltration and contamination fuelled the idea that the enemy might be lurking near you, under the guise of your next-door neighbour or your colleague at work. Indeed, given its premise, *The Americans* brilliantly captures the fear of being surrounded by enemies who are all the more insidious because they don't look or sound like enemies at all – a fear that in the 1950s had found expression in such science-fiction movies as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958).⁴ While presumably affecting the entire planet, the alien threat in those movies was particularly frightening to American audiences because it seemed to target middle America, and specifically the type of suburban family life which, in the 1950s, was insistently presented as the very essence of the American way of life. In *The Americans*, not only has the alien infiltration successfully taken place, but the seemingly perfect suburban home has become simultaneously the base of and cover for the operations of a mission that aims at destabilizing American society from within.

In addition to evoking the ideological and cultural landscape of the 1950s, *The Americans* invites comparison to previous television portrayals of families. For example, given their unusual identity status, the Jennings may be said to bear some resemblance to the eccentric, sometimes outlandish families of 1960s sitcoms such as *Bewitched*, *The Addams Family*, and *The Munsters*. The expression of a reaction against the bland conformity of Eisenhower America, the characters portrayed in those series were suburban American families through and through, but with a twist (magical powers, a macabre appearance and/or an unorthodox lifestyle, etc.).⁵ Similarly, the Jennings are simultaneously typically American (given the perfection of their role playing) and atypical, indeed secretly anti-American. Because of its psychologically insightful

⁴ The same premise – aliens impersonating humans – is at the basis of the popular NBC sitcom *3rd Rock from the Sun*, which ran from 1996 to 2001. Interestingly, the aliens in this case pose as an American family as a means for observing the behavior of human beings. Once again, suburban America is an object of interest for extraterrestrial forces, but the intent is benign, and the treatment of the situation is comedic.

⁵ As Lynn Spigel has argued, these programs “poked fun at narrative conventions of the sit-com form and engaged viewers in a popular dialogue through which they might reconsider social ideals” (214).

portrayal of marriage, gender and generational conflicts, *The Americans* may also be regarded as a successor to the socially-conscious programming that emerged in the 1970s with such ground-breaking series as the sitcom *All in the Family*, the drama series *Family*, and the reality/documentary series *An American Family*, and continued in the 1980s with *Thirtysomething*.

What makes *The Americans* unique in the contemporary American television landscape – filled though it is of high-quality dramas featuring problematic families – is that it not only offers a multi-faceted representation of family dynamics, but enacts and dissects that very representation for us. At its centre are secret foreign agents whose mission, and indeed their survival, relies on their performance as American spouses and parents. While their secret activities depend heavily on the use of appearance-altering disguise (makeup, wigs, clothes and eyewear), the most demanding roles they play are those of Philip and Elizabeth Jennings, husband and wife, working partners and loving parents of two children born and raised in the United States. What we see are two highly accomplished actors (Keri Russell as Elizabeth and Matthew Rhys as Philip) playing characters who, like Method-acting performers, fully inhabit their pretend identities to the point of achieving perfect mimicry. As a result, the series invites us to observe closely, and reflect upon, the challenges that the Jennings face in trying to make their marriage work and do a good job as parents. As Masha Gessen has noted, when we first meet the Jennings, they are in a crucial moment of transition and by the end of the season they “become the roles they’ve been playing”, a process which includes adopting “a psychotherapy-infused, stylistically American way of conducting a relationship”.

As part of its multi-layered approach to the representation of the family, *The Americans* is a television series which alludes to, and makes narrative use of, television itself as a major provider of cultural and ideological messages as well as a staple of shared domesticity (in the pre-internet, pre-mobile phone era). It does so, intriguingly, through the casting of Richard Thomas in the key role of FBI agent Frank Gaad, head of the agency’s special unit entrusted with the task of finding and neutralizing Soviet illegals operating in the United States. For American viewers who grew up in the 1970s and, thanks to countless reruns, even for younger members of the audience, Richard Thomas will always be identified with his role as John Boy, the eldest son of *The Waltons* (1972-81), the drama series which revolved around a large family in rural depression-era Virginia. Celebrated or parodied, depending on one’s point of

view, as the quintessential (white) American family, *The Waltons* undoubtedly struck a nerve when it originally aired and soon became part of the American collective imagination. Nowhere was this more evident than when, during the presidential campaign of 1992, the then president George H. W. Bush famously exhorted American families to be “a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons” (qtd. in Douglas 12). Thus, the casting of Richard Thomas as a defender of American institutions and values inevitably carries strong cultural and ideological associations. It is almost as if John Boy, virtually inseparable from the actor who played him, the “perfect” son of the “perfect” American family, had been chosen to hunt the fake American family (the Jennings) who poses a grave threat to the macrofamily of the United States.

It is a measure of what critic David Bianculli has referred to as *The Americans'* awareness “of television history”, that an entire episode (Season 4, episode 9) revolves around the much anticipated and controversial telecast of ABC's 1983 TV movie *The Day After*, which imagined the devastating consequences of nuclear conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as experienced by the “heartland” community of Lawrence, Kansas (444-45). Not only does the episode, written by Joe Weisberg and Tracey Scott Wilson, focus and reflect on a television show as a collective shared experience, reverberating in millions of American living rooms, but it does so, specifically, on a cultural product that made the horror of nuclear catastrophe *literally* familiar. *The Day After* made the unimaginable imaginable and frightening precisely because it presented it through the lens of a typical middle-class family as they prepared to celebrate the wedding of their eldest daughter.

On more than one occasion, Joe Weisberg and his co-creator Joel Fields have stated that the Cold War backdrop of *The Americans* and the dangerous, secret activities of its protagonists are essentially a narrative device to examine the inner workings of a family and, in particular, the fraught relationship between husband and wife. As Joel Fields, interviewed by June Thomas, put it, *The Americans* is “at its core a marriage story” (“A Conversation”). Indeed, one way to describe the series would be by borrowing the title of one of the most celebrated TV dramas of all time, namely Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973). In *The Americans*, “International relations”, Joe Weisberg has pointed out to journalist Katie Arnold-Ratliff, function as “just an allegory for the human relations” (“Spy vs. Spy”). While Weisberg's unique expertise as a former CIA agent has certainly infused the series with an air of credibility and competence, he has significantly drawn attention to his fascination with

the private sphere of his ex-colleagues. Significantly, he revealed that the “most interesting thing” he observed during his time at the CIA “was the family life of agents who served abroad with kids and spouses” (“Spy vs. Spy”). Ultimately, in *The Americans* the real suspense lies in the durability of the marriage between its protagonists. Speaking about the series in 2013, when he himself could not anticipate how long it would last and what would happen to its characters, Weisberg stated: “Espionage adds drama and raises the stakes, but the thing people are going to care about is this couple and whether or not they make it. We already know how the Cold War ends. Nobody knows how this marriage will end” (“Spy vs. Spy”).

However unusual and grounded in a specific historical, political, and cultural context, the story of Philip and Elizabeth speaks to viewers all over the world because it intersects and examines questions of gender and forms of relationship that are widely relatable and continue to be pressing objects of debate. For example, through dialogues and occasional flashbacks we learn that the training the two agents underwent was often viciously brutal, including as it did a heavy dose of psychological and physical violence, intended to desensitize them to the violence they themselves would be called upon to perpetrate as part of their missions. In order to become Philip and Elizabeth, they learned to use their bodies not only as lethal weapons, thanks to the mastering of various combat techniques, but also as instruments of seduction. Learning to have sex with strangers and dissimulate pleasure was a key component of their training and indeed we see them making abundant use of that skill in numerous plot lines across the overall narrative arc of the series. Trauma was inevitably part of the process. In a horrifying flashback, we see young Nadezhda being raped by her instructor and superior who, years later, having been kidnapped by her and Mikhail/Philip for defecting to the United States, confesses that raping young women trainees was considered one of the perks of his position of authority. Significantly, it is Philip who ends up killing the defector, not only because his presence in his household puts his family at risk but, also, importantly, to avenge the crime he had committed against the woman who is now his wife. Although dictated by security reasons, this is, in essence, an honour killing.

Flashbacks also show us the training Philip went through as a young man in the Soviet Union. In particular, a rapid montage shows us the different sexual partners, of all ages and shapes, female and male, who were allotted to him as part of his instruction. As Emily Nussbaum has justly observed, in

“those flashbacks, as he slept with strangers, his experience wasn’t portrayed as a sexy fantasy, either, but as a form of institutional abuse”. Significantly, Nussbaum makes this point with reference to one of the most disturbing plot lines of the series, in which Philip is called upon to seduce Kimberly, an underage girl who has a complicated relationship with her frequently absent father. Although by then we have seen Philip commit horrible acts of violence and murder several people, this operation comes across as one of the most shocking he has been ordered to conduct. This is due, in large part, to the excellent performances of Julia Garner, who admirably conveys Kimberly’s teen-age vulnerability and, especially, Matthew Rhys, who makes Philip’s discomfort and self-disgust transpire even through the genial façade he has adopted for the occasion.

The long-ranging effects of the abuse Elizabeth and Philip suffered and which, in turn, they inflict on others, inevitably spill over into their marriage and their relationship with their children. This becomes painfully apparent when Elizabeth gains the confidence of Martha Hanson – a secretary in Frank Gaad’s office – whom Philip, under the name of Clark, has seduced and subsequently married, thus becoming to all intents and purposes a bigamist. Posing as Clark’s sister, Elizabeth becomes the recipient of very intimate details about Clark and Martha’s married life and is surprised to learn that, as Clark, Philip adopts a very aggressive and domineering demeanour when they have sex. Simultaneously bemused and intrigued, one day she asks Philip to treat her as Clark treats Martha. But when Philip, after overcoming his initial resistance, complies, there is nothing remotely titillating about what takes place between them. To experience or rather, given her past, to *re*-experience victimization, is horrifying to Elizabeth. Similarly, Philip is aghast at his own conduct which has brought into the supposedly safe space of his home the toxic hyper-masculinity he has been taught to adopt as part of his operations. Although in different ways and to different degrees, both Elizabeth and Philip feel violated.

Inevitably, aspects of the attitude and behaviour Philip and Elizabeth adopt when carrying out their secret operations seep into their family life. This is apparent when Paige, as part of becoming an adult and asserting her own identity, challenges their parental authority. Alarmed by her involvement with a local church and, especially, her close relationship with the pastor and his wife, Philip and Elizabeth do not hesitate to threaten her verbally and resort to coercive measures to reclaim their hold on her. Tension between

Paige and her parents escalates when, in Season 3, she confronts them about their secrecy and extracts from them a partial confession about their true identities (crucially, they continue to lie to her about the murders they have committed in their line of work). What the series portrays is, in a sense, an extreme, heightened form of what countless families experience, namely the potential unravelling of stability because of teenage rebelliousness. The stakes may be exceptionally high in the Jennings household, but the situation is very familiar. In the words of Joel Fields: “Sometimes, when you’re struggling in your marriage or with your kid, it feels like life or death. For Philip and Elizabeth, it often is” (“Spy vs. Spy”).

Similarly, the planning and training that went into the construction of Philip and Elizabeth as a credible American couple bears a considerable resemblance to a form of relationship which in several cultures is still widely practiced, namely arranged marriages. As is often the case with that type of union, Philip and Elizabeth were brought together by their elders and had very limited say in the process. Although we do learn that, before being introduced to Philip, Elizabeth had rejected the first partner that the KGB had selected for her, the fact remains that she was expected to play the role of wife, have sex and procreate children with a man she had never known before, in a foreign country. The Jennings needed to have children in part because it made their cover as an average married couple more convincing but, more importantly, because in the KGB’s long-term strategy, their children, as authentic American citizens, might become in the future formidable infiltrators (in politics and/or intelligence). Interestingly, this emphasis on procreation as the essential outcome of marriage, also aligns the Jennings’ union to a religious marriage – something of a paradox, since the Jennings are convinced atheists.

The morphing of the KGB arranged marriage into a “genuine” relationship, a marriage of love, albeit never free from conflict (as is the case in most marriages), undoubtedly constitutes one of the most interesting plot lines of *The Americans*. At the end of the first season the Jennings separate, temporarily, after Elizabeth discovers that Philip, while engaged in a covert operation, slept with an old flame. Although both Elizabeth and Philip have multiple sex partners as part of their assignments, Elizabeth regards what Philip did in this case as something entirely different, a real, deeply hurtful betrayal. Similarly, in the same season, Philip keenly resents Elizabeth’s close connection with Gregory, a black activist she had recruited, because he senses that they have strong feelings for each other. Unlike Philip, however, Elizabeth keeps those feelings

in check and, as we see in Episode 3, ultimately rejects Gregory's advances. Philip's jealousy of Gregory, however, does not fade even after Gregory dies in the line of duty. If anything, it intensifies because he witnesses first-hand the depth of Elizabeth's grief. Indeed, the memory of Gregory may be said to haunt the Jennings' marriage, because it is deeply interwoven with the largest bone of contention between Philip and Elizabeth, namely the different degrees of their commitment to their mission and their different attitudes towards American society. While Elizabeth is totally dedicated to her role as a "soldier" for the Soviet Union and is unwavering in her belief in the superiority of the Communist regime over American capitalism, Philip over the years has grown fond of the American lifestyle and, especially, of American popular culture. Elizabeth never loses sight of the fact that her image as a comfortable middle-class American wife and mother is a façade designed to make her a powerful asset for the KGB. She simply accepts the fact that, for the greater good, she needs to conform to a bourgeois lifestyle and appear to enjoy the advantages that in the United States are the prerogative of the economically prosperous section of society. When she can speak openly, however, she does not hesitate to paint Americans with a broad brush as weak, mentally comparing the comparatively uneventful life of the people with whom she interacts with the terrible hardships she and her mother had faced in Russia, after Elizabeth's father had abandoned the family. By contrast, Philip is clearly susceptible to the siren call of American consumerism. For example, in the second season he cannot hide the sheer delight he feels in buying a new car and showing it off, especially to his son Henry, in a typical scene of male bonding over ownership and hedonism. But it is especially in his unmistakable fondness for American popular culture (music, movies, junk food) that Philip's real feelings toward "the enemy" find expression. Tellingly, he is at his most delighted when he has the opportunity to sport that quintessential piece of American footwear – cowboy boots – and join a group of patrons in a bar engaged in line dancing. Much to Elizabeth's disbelief and horror, Philip even contemplates defecting to the United States, which would make it possible for him and Elizabeth to become the American couple they have been impersonating so convincingly. As he puts it: "We *are* Philip and Elizabeth Jennings. We have been for a long time. ... [We can] Get relocated. And just be happy. Take the good life". When she berates him for even considering betraying their country, he replies "Our family comes first" (Season 1, pilot). The ideological rift between the Jennings widens to its utmost when Elizabeth, in compliance with her

superior's wishes, and despite Philip's strong objections, throws herself into the effort of recruiting and training her own daughter Paige.

As René Dietrich has noted, *The Americans* differs from other acclaimed drama series such as *The Sopranos* and *Breaking Bad*, in its handling of gender roles. Whereas in those series, it is the male antihero who finds fulfilment in the second life he leads outside the home (and outside the law) – a life of danger, power, excitement, and violence – in *The Americans* it is the female protagonist who is fully devoted to her other, unofficial pursuit (211). Where I partially disagree with Dietrich, is when she contends that the “subversive potential of this reversal is somewhat contained, though, as the characters are Russian spies and therefore do not represent the American norm in any way” (212). It seems to me that the Jennings *do* represent the American norm, in the sense that their perfect recreation of an American married couple in the early eighties even includes the new role and agency that American women had achieved as a result of the pressure exercised by the militant feminism of the 1970s. As we learn through dialogues and flashbacks, Philip and Elizabeth arrived in the United States in the 1960s and lived as Americans through the seventies (a period that saw, among other things, greater access to contraception and the legalization of abortion). In other words, they refined their new American identity, their identity as a married couple, in a phase of profound transformation for American society, especially as regards gender roles. Indeed, it is possible to read Elizabeth's total identification with her mission (her “career”) as a metaphor for growing female empowerment in America. Significantly, the same tendency seems to be at play in the younger generation, because it is Paige, not Henry, who feels the need to commit to a cause, first by engaging in the socially conscious work of her progressive church and later, after she has discovered the real identity of her parents, as a trainee KGB agent.

Since its clever title sequence, in which the iconography of the United States alternates with that of the Soviet Union in a fast-paced montage, *The Americans* invites a comparative approach which reveals more similarities than differences between the two systems and ideologies. In the first season, the tensions that threaten to unravel the Jennings' pseudo-American marriage are mirrored by the lack of meaningful communication between their next-door neighbours, Stan and Sandra Beeman. In the end, however, it is the “imitation” marriage that survives, while its authentic counterpart collapses. As it happens, Stan is an FBI agent who is part of the very unit entrusted with

the task of hunting down Russian spies posing as Americans. Ironically, when he moves with his family to their new suburban house in Falls Church, it is Philip and Elizabeth who welcome them, perfectly mimicking the traditional American gesture of bringing baked goods to one's new neighbours. In both marriages one of the spouses (respectively, Elizabeth and Stan) places country above family and this inevitably causes friction within their households. Just as the Jennings use sex as a lever to approach, and get information from, Americans who work in strategically important fields, so does Stan, when he conducts an affair with Nina Krilova, who works in the Soviet Embassy in Washington D.C. And like the Jennings, Stan has recourse to blackmail and murder in the exercise of his work. We also get a glimpse of family life in the Soviet Union, among the upper echelons of power, when the series follows Oleg Burov as he moves back into his parents' home in Moscow after serving as head of a KGB intelligence operation in Washington D.C. The son of the Soviet Minister of Transportation, he is constantly trying to prove himself to his father, especially after the death of his brother – a captain in the Soviet army – in Afghanistan. The dialogue is in Russian, but what transpires with painful clarity is the same difficulty in establishing meaningful communication that cripples the conversation between Stan Beeman and his estranged son, or between the Jennings and Paige.

As the overall narrative arc of *The Americans* implies, there are additional parallels that can be traced between other, larger family-like structures portrayed in the series, namely the antagonistic organizations of the FBI and the KGB, and, at the macro level, the countries of the United States and the Soviet Union. At the outset, both countries resemble traditional patriarchal families presided over by (supposedly) strong, elderly, authoritative male figures: Reagan and Brezhnev. In terms of organization, strategies, and methods, the FBI and the KGB are practically mirror images of each other. However, Weisberg and his co-writers suggest that while both organizations are largely male-dominated and sexist, it is in the KGB that women have more opportunities to hold positions of power and crucial responsibility. Cases in point are, for example, Tatiana Vyazemtseva, who works in the Soviet Embassy, and Claudia, the agent who, initially, has a very contentious relationship with Elizabeth and Philip as their “handler” and conveyor of instructions from the KGB. By contrast, within the FBI unit in which Stan Beeman works, women are relegated to the traditional role of secretaries. And perhaps work-related frustration does play a part in making Martha Hanson

particularly susceptible to Philip's advances. In addition to being strongly attracted to him, she eagerly responds to his appeal for help, since he initially convinces her that he is conducting a secret operation to uncover malpractice within the FBI. In more ways than one, he makes her feel valued.

Central to the world of *The Americans*, secrecy "opens a space of exception from the rule of law, an exception that can breed violence, corruption and oppression" (Horn 106). In recent years, critics such as Jason Landrum and René Dietrich have argued that secrecy offers the male antiheroes of quality tv dramas (such as *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad* and, to some extent, *Mad Men*) an outlet for transgression, a sphere of action wherein there is no moral and legal constraint on their agency, assertiveness, and libido. While they try, ostensibly, to protect their transparent life as husbands and fathers by keeping it separate from their illicit activities, it is in their secret life, away from the demands and obligations of domesticity, that they find real fulfilment. I would add that the type of masculinity these series portray is a sort of updated, extreme version of the trope of the American man in flight from normative relationships, marriage and fatherhood that Leslie Fiedler famously described as informing classic American literature in his 1948 ground-breaking essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!". *The Americans*, however, differs significantly from this model. First of all, as we have seen, in this case marriage, parenthood, domesticity are themselves part of the secret sphere. They are not what they seem. Secondly, in *The Americans* the "double", parallel life of the protagonists offers both of them, regardless of their gender, the opportunity to break the law, have multiple sexual partners, and freely engage in deception and violence. In addition, in the later part of the series, it is Philip who retreats into the public, transparent world of home and work (his "official" work at the travel agency). Tellingly, the tipping points that nudge him in that direction are both related to his identity and role as father. First there is the excruciatingly uncomfortable closeness in age between Kimberly (the young woman he seduces), and his own daughter Paige. Then, there is the shocking realization that his children, starting with Paige, have been part of the KGB's long-term recruitment strategy all along. Seeing his wife train Paige brings home to him, more vividly than ever before, the irreconcilable contradiction between his duty toward his family and his (real) country. Significantly, in the last season Philip goes back into action, behind his wife's back, to thwart a plan – set in motion by a faction within the KGB – to undermine and possibly eliminate Gorbachev. In effect, Philip joins in the effort to save another father,

namely the new, young father of the Soviet Union who promises to inaugurate a new era of openness and reform.

Ultimately, however, Philip cannot save his own family. The two worlds he and Elizabeth have inhabited for decades finally collide when their real identities are discovered by the FBI. Forced to escape precipitously – their only chance is to cross the border into Canada – Philip and Elizabeth make the lacerating decision of leaving Henry behind, because Henry is completely oblivious of the fact of who they really are. To all intents and purposes, they lose him to the United States, the only country Henry has ever known, the larger family in which he has been raised and formed. In the end, Philip and Elizabeth, on the verge of resuming their identities as Mikhail and Nadezhda, lose Paige too, when she gets off the train at the last stop before the border. It remains an open question, while her parents watch her helplessly as the train moves away, whether her act means that she has chosen her brother over her parents, or the United States over the Soviet Union, or has merely asserted her independence as an adult. What can be stated with relative certainty is that even in this thrilling, suspense-laden finale, *The Americans* presents us with an intensely relatable and finely perceived family rite of passage. Under the semblance of a Cold War spy story (the series' own disguise), *The Americans* leaves us with the poignant representation of that inevitable moment when parents and children go their separate ways and children, upon embarking on their new lives as adults, become, to some extent, strangers to those who have raised them.

WORKS CITED

- The Addams Family*. Created by David Levy. ABC, 1964-1966. Television.
- All in the Family*. Created by Norman Lear. CBS, 1971-1979. Television.
- An American Family*. Created by Craig Gilbert. PBS, 1973. Television.
- The Americans*. Created by Joe Weisberg. FX Network, 2013-2018. Television.
- Arnold-Ratliff, Katie. "Spy vs. Spy: A Q&A with *The Americans* Creator Joe Weisberg". *Entertainment Time* March 12 (2013). 5 November 2022 <<https://entertainment.time.com/2013/03/12/spy-vs-spy-a-qa-with-the-americans-creator-joe-weisberg/>>
- Bewitched*. Created by Sol Saks. ABC, 1964-1972. Television.
- Bianculli, David. *The Platinum Age of Television: From I Love Lucy to The Walking Dead, How TV Became Terrific*. New York: Anchor Books, 2017.
- Breaking Bad*. Created by Vince Gilligan. AMC, 2008-2013. Television.
- Creeber, Glen. *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.
- The Day After*. Dir. Nicholas Meyer. ABC, 1983. Television.
- Dietrich, René. "Secret Spheres from *Breaking Bad* to *The Americans*: The Politics of Secrecy, Masculinity, and Transgression in 21st-Century U.S. Television Drama". *Transgressive Television: Politics and Crime in 21st-Century American TV Series*. Ed. Birgit Däwes, Alexandra Ganser and Nicole Poppenhagen. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2015. 195-215.
- Douglas, William. *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2003.
- Family*. Created by Jay Presson Allen. AfBC, 1976-1980. Television.
- Fernandez, Manny, and Fernanda Santos. "Couples Accused as Spies Were the Suburbs Personified." *The New York Times*. June 29, 2010. Online. 5 November 2022 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/30/nyregion/30couples.html?searchResultPosition=1>>
- Fiedler, Leslie. "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" 1948. *A New Fiedler Reader*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1999. 3-12.
- Game of Thrones*. Created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. HBO, 2011-2019. Television.

- Gessen, Masha. "Translating *The Americans*, and Seeing a Mirror of My Own American Experience". *The New Yorker* June 1 (2018). 5 November 2022 <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/translating-the-americans-and-seeing-a-mirror-of-my-own-american-experience>>
- Horn, Eva. "Logics of Political Secrecy". *Theory, Culture & Society*. 28.7-8 (2011): 103-22.
- I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. Dir. Gene Fowler Jr. Paramount Pictures, 1958.
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Dir. Don Siegel. Walter Wanger Productions, 1956.
- Landrum, Jason. "Say My Name: The Fantasy of Liberated Masculinity". *The Methods of Breaking Bad: Essays on Narrative, Character and Ethics*. Ed. Jacob Blevins and Dafydd Wood. Jefferson: McFarland, 2015. 94-105.
- The Munsters*. Created by Allan Burns and Chris Hayward. CBS, 1964-1966. Television.
- Ozark*. Created by Bill Dubuque and Mark Williams. Netflix, 2017-2022. Television.
- Nussbaum, Emily. "*The Americans* Is Too Bleak, and That's Why It's Great". *The New Yorker* March 18 (2015). 5 November 2022 <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-americans-is-too-bleak-and-thats-why-its-great>>
- Rowland, Robert C. and John M. Jones. "Reagan's Strategy for the Cold War and the Evil Empire Address." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 19. 3 (2016): 427-64.
- Scenes from a Marriage*. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. SVT, 1973. Television.
- The Sopranos*. Created by David Chase. HBO, 1999-2007. Television.
- Spigel, Lynn. "From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sit-Com". *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*. Ed. Constance Penley et al. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 205-35.
- Succession*. Created by Jesse Armstrong. HBO, 2018-. Television.
- 3rd Rock from the Sun*. Created by Bonnie Turner and Terry Turner. NBC, 1996-2001. Television.
- Thirtysomething*. Created by Edward Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz. ABC, 1987-1991. Television.
- Thomas, June. "A Conversation with *The Americans* Showrunners Joe Weisberg and Joel Fields". *Slate* January 31 (2013). 5 November 2022 <<https://slate.com/culture/2013/01/the-americans-fx-spy-series-creators-joe-weisberg-and-joel-fields.html>>
- The Waltons*. Created by Earl Hammer Jr. CBS, 1972-1981. Television.

The Affair: Authorship and Melodrama in Complex TV

VINCENZO MAGGITTI

When we watch a series like *The Affair*, the first question to be raised is about the way we perceive it among the plethora of TV series. Does it function as an instrument of subversion or as escapism? Neither function is absent from the televised offers that have been growing exponentially since the start of the new millennium. As viewers, we are aware of the wide range of disquieting views that TV series can convey, both politically (*House of Cards*) and socially (*Breaking Bad*). A line of separation must never be drawn, as scriptwriters – always mindful of Shakespeare’s teaching – are well aware. *The Affair*, however, is liable to be open to a more controversial debate, since its contents deal with one of the longest-running plots in the history of literature, as the title indicates: a melodramatic relationship.

Melodrama is the keyword in any close analysis of this series. In fact, I borrowed the opening question from Thomas Elsaesser’s seminal essay on family melodrama, when he ponders over the “radical ambiguity” (72) concerning film melodrama, as compared to the previous expressions of the narrative, such as in Samuel Richardson’s novels or Giuseppe Verdi’s operas. The melodramatic turn, we could say, is so important in cinema as to be coincidental to film becoming a fictional representation instead of the

documentary and scientific product it used to be in the beginning. It brings along a set of new stylistic choices, already present in silent movies, regarding the frame composition and the filming of actors within its space, with the intensity of a detail or a close-up to signal a specific moment in being, thus allowing gifted directors to shift political themes onto a personalized level. In this respect, Erich von Stroheim is one of those who best interpreted this visual ability. In his movie *Foolish Wives*¹ the protagonist, the fake count Karamzin, seduces several women belonging to different social classes, from his maid to the diplomat's wife and openly criticizes American society and its addiction to money and gold, while pursuing the same goal himself through the lure of his European uniforms and their seductive power in the 'innocent' American eye. Therefore, the border between emotional relations and social issues in any given melodramatic film can be more difficult to spot because of this visual relevance in its language. *The Affair* is directly consistent with this tradition and my article will focus on the way the series attempts a frequent intersection of personal and social themes within the frame of multiple points of view. These multiple viewpoints aim at deconstructing any Manichean opposition between female and male perspectives as well as adjusting a moral and emotional response to the narrative drive.

In today's so called complex TV, "narrative complexity redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration" (Mittell 18) and television studies have, therefore, been urged to shift their interest to narrative forms, instead of just focusing on issues of cultural representation in the series. In addition, the usually unplanned narrative close of series and their dependence on a constantly renegotiable narrative development have brought into play other practices shaping storytelling, which include the wider context of the television industry, audiences, critics, and creators. Therefore, a moment crucial to the potential success of a series is the beginning, where all the rhetorical and visual devices are on display to capture the viewer's attention. The appeal of a genre in a TV series, however, has shifted considerably from the standards of television prior to the spread of pay TV and cable channels in order to comply with the expectations of a different kind of audience, who is ready to follow narrative detours that overlap borders with other genres on the map. In his

¹ For a close analysis of a film scene, where the play of seduction works through the metanarrative use of a book, whose title is the same as the movie's (mirroring the overlapping layers between book and series in *The Affair*) see Maggitti (253-55).

essay, Mittell has deliberately written more about pilot episodes in a complex TV series, as being the most conventional and, at the same time, least typical since they should convey to the audience both a feeling of familiarity and a touch of the unexpected.

Considering how weirdly *The Affair* makes itself recognizable as a genre already in the first episode can be a good starting point for our analysis.

I. HOW DID ALL THIS MESS BEGIN?

When ‘the affair’ begins, we do not actually know that much about the characters. As each episode is divided into two chapters, initially focused on each of the protagonists, what is shown at the beginning is Noah’s family frantically leaving their New York brownstone apartment and reaching the site of their holiday at his in-laws’, in Montauk (NY), where Noah can devote himself to the writing of his new novel. When Noah meets Alison, who works as a waitress in a local fish diner, she is dramatically introduced by her intervention to save Noah’s youngest daughter from choking. The audience will only know later how much this situation is telling in relation to Alison’s life, as she lost her own same-age child in an accident. But this is what Alison tells in her own version of how the affair started, following Noah’s report, where she gets visibly emotional about the accident, but does not take it upon herself to do anything about it, as if she were frozen by her trauma, as yet unknown, as I said before, to the audience.

In both versions, we hear, respectively, Noah’s and Alison’s voices answering questions about the way it all began between them. The questions are asked by someone we do not yet know, a disembodied voice in the cinematic experience.² The sound and the pressure of these voices, however, remind us strongly of a police department and an interrogating detective, and the images will soon confirm that impression. The first consequence of this aural account corroborating our visual perception is that the melodrama will be colored by hints of crime in the following episodes, which means that the genres are going to be mixed. This is not unusual either in classic melodrama or in its modern declensions. What is not common in television series is that

² For a better understanding on how this split between voice and body cinematically happens, see Chion (66-95).

the whole story becomes a flashback, a much more filmic device, whose most iconic example, in my opinion, is still the confession delivered by a dying man to a police officer in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*.

A further item of analysis is provided by the clash between the images and the voice-over narration. In the aftermath of the judiciary experience the protagonists are going through, a change in their attitude to their affair is apparent in their voices and conveys a detachment that is counter to the images presented. How they talk is furthermore highlighted by the comments they intersperse their answers with, which are, in fact, the only scraps of interview we are allowed to hear before image and sound coincide to let the audience realize where the utterances are coming from. These comments are relevant both to the form of the narrative and its relation to narrative conventions.

Noah describes himself as a family man, with four children, who thought his future was with them, feigning a picture of happiness suddenly marred by his older boy's fake attempt at suicide. Alison starts her report by saying that when things started it was a dark and stormy night, only to revert to a more ordinary tone and apologize to the detective for being foolish. Both comments affect the way we perceive the images, leading us to be aware of a narrator who is overlapping chronology and mixing genres at the very moment the series is presenting itself as a specific type of narration.

Now that we have established a melodramatic frame for the series, following the directions given in the first episode, our focus must zoom out to have a more panoramic view of TV series and set *The Affair* in a wider context. According to Linda Williams, melodrama is such a frequent component of TV series that it can be envisioned more as a narrative mode than a genre on its own. In fact, melodramatic tones are traceable and recognizable in almost every TV series, even in the ones that, apparently, seem to be targeting a different kind of audience, such as *The Wire*. *The Wire*, as Williams has shown in detail, introduces melodrama as a mode in several incidents of the series but ironically finds its greater accomplishment in "developing something more ambitious than the conventional melodrama we love to deride" (7). The spreading of melodramatic nuances provides an interesting key to interpreting the narrative complexity of the new form of TV serialization. Being complex, TV productively interferes with and reacts against the persistence of cultural boundaries between the male and female perception of the series, also touching on the race issue. As Goldberg puts it, "Williams acknowledges but refuses the

limitation of melodrama to the terrain of female gender, opting instead to read it as a mode that serves to index American culture, especially American false consciousness and guilt" (xii). In *The Affair*, as I suggested above, complexity is further reflected in the so called "Rashomon effect", the multiple storytelling by different characters as used in the same titled movie by Akira Kurosawa: applied to the narrative outline of the episodes and, therefore, multiplying our perspectives on the narrated events according to whether it is a male or a female voice telling the same narrative from a different point of view. This stylistic choice makes the critical debate on the issue of gendered-qualified genres one of the main themes of the series. The choice of melodrama as *the* genre/mode in the series should be read through the lenses of this cultural trope and help us focus on the most relevant effects on its structure, both narratively and thematically.

2. GENRES, GENDERS AND RACE.

Starting with the issue of gender, melodrama has often been associated with TV soap-operas because of its stress on the sentimental attitude, that has resulted in a recognition of excess as its formal trait. The connection to a prevalently or all-female audience had already made it into a secondary item in the hierarchy of film studies, framing its discussion in such a context that:

whereas many of Hollywood's other genres were granted the dignity of masculine and classical labels – western as epic, gangster as tragic hero – melodrama's emotional effects were syphoned off into a separately gendered genre, precluding consideration of melodrama's broader significance across popular cinema's genre systems. (Gledhill and Williams 18)

However, the way in which melodrama is recognizable even in realistic narrations that eschew the rules of stylistic and emotional excesses, asks for a different approach to its analysis, interpreting most of the TV dramas as a form of melodramatic serial. *The Affair* is part of this expanded category, with the exception, as I wrote above, of staging melodrama as its main genre/mode, encompassing all the genres and issues that it involves in its narrative development. Let's have a closer look at them and how they are sewn into the main fabric of the text.

The first genres I have mentioned are thriller and detective, the former only evoked, the latter more visibly stated, since it is the interview a detective is having with both Alison and Noah that frames the episode of their first meeting. To the same genres belong Cole (Alison's husband) and his family's trading in drugs, as it will be used as possible evidence in the search for clues about Scottie, Cole's brother, in the investigation of his death. Selling drugs is not only lucrative for the family, but it is part of a revenue that shores up the crisis in fishing, which used to be the most important activity in Montauk's economy. This feature in the series can be claimed to belong to a trend in ecocriticism which includes references to illegal activities as a consequence of a suffering economy. Crucial to the series, indeed, is the divide between New York and Montauk. These are the two settings of this drama, critically standing for the city and the village in a millennial rewriting of Raymond Williams' economic and social tensions between the country and the city in a contemporary North American context. From a melodramatic point of view, Noah and his family represent the urban intruders in the apparently traditional lore of the Montauk community.

Not in order of appearance, but quite relevant to the prismatic shaping of themes in the series, we have race issues. These issues are embodied by different characters. Two of them are male and are new partners in the sentimental existence of Helen (Noah's divorcing wife) and Alison (who also marries Noah). The former is Vik, a surgeon born into an Indian family, whose deep concern is not to disappoint his parents because of all the sacrifices they have made for him to achieve such a good position in his American life. The latter is Ben, an originally Hispanic war veteran just returned from Afghanistan, who faces serious problems both in his military experience and in his private life. The range is widened to include Noah's special relation to one of his students, the Afro-American Anton, whose mother Janelle, supported by Noah, is the school principal coping with racially biased criticism by higher educational authorities. Last, but not least, there is Cole's new wife, the South American Lisa, who has no legal documents and lives in a clandestine and precarious situation as an illegal citizen.

As a series portraying melodrama in an extended 'play', *The Affair* deals with gender in more than a trajectory. Alison and Noah, of course, represent the poles of attraction who are entrusted with the task of redefining the meaning of an affair. Noah's relationship with Alison operates in the service of affection, helping him to retrospectively find the reasons for his emotional

detachment from his wife and finally unearth the causes of a discontent that is deeply rooted in his family history. Noah will retrace different stages of his affairs with other women, besides Alison, the most significant of which is with the French visiting professor at the university where he teaches creative writing. Her involvement with Noah starts from her indirect fascination with the sexual encounters that imbue most of the pages of Noah's novel, but embedded within the sexual theme, and imposed upon it, she finds the heart of darkness Noah reveals when facing the ghosts of his youth. Back home, she will face the ostracism of her faculty principal, who, disappointed by the poor results of her research on a medieval manuscript on courtly love, hints at her faltering position in the department, once her husband, and former professor, is dead and, therefore, unable to defend her academic standing. Her storyline supplies the plot with a clue as to gender prejudice in the workplace (even by same-sex opponents) and is functional as well to Noah's redoubling his fellow American expatriates' experience in Paris and cementing the parallelism with Hemingway which runs, often ironically, through the whole series, a point which I am going to deal with later in this essay, when literature becomes the main focus of my argument.

It's Alison, however, who plays the main 'role' in the gender agenda of the scriptwriters. Discussing the main points in her revised theory of a melodramatic mode, Williams writes that:

If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action, then the operative mode is melodrama. (43)

Alison's character has lost her innocence with her child's death by water, a symbolical rite that is more than once revived with different emotional options (and it is the main theme of Fiona Apple's song in the opening credits of the series). She defines herself as a victim at the end, when she is once again blamed for having seduced a man as if that was the only thing she is good at, and she goes through a whole sequence of reconfiguring moments in her attempt at retrieving her virtues by taking on a counseling job and having a second chance at being a mother. She seems to reject an empathic reaction from the viewer, at least in the aesthetic sense of feeling one's way into an art object or another person which is attached to the first, now classic definition

of empathy by Theodore Lipps at the beginning of the twentieth century. She is rather ambiguous in her demeanor to other characters, who, nonetheless, end up by feeling for her more than they used to. She is also one of the few characters in the series who do not undergo psychoanalysis in order to cope with the inner turmoil and trammels of their relationships.³

Contemporary TV dramas are often blamed for emphasizing masculinity in order to deny any allegedly historical connection with the kind of gendered audience that melodrama seemed aimed to attract. Since melodrama has been revised as a mode and therefore integrated into other genres, any gendered division has quite lost its meaning. And the convergence of media, “the competing and contradictory ideas about participation that are shaping this new media culture” (Jenkins 22) is an added push in that direction, since each complex TV series draws on different sources, mainly from literature to cinema, but quite significantly from television fanzine and blogs as well, and contains a certain number of scenes where the borders between ‘masculine’ realism and ‘female’ melodrama become blurred and reach a balanced concurrence, since they both contribute to the revelation of moral and emotional truths. In *The Affair* the multiple perspectives that the structure of each episode allows have the controversial effect of apparently reinforcing a gendered gaze on the story while, at the same time, dismantling its priority in our expectations because of the lack of any objective grasp of the reality of the events around which each scene is centered.

By putting in contrastive relation the version of any narrated event, according to each of the two main characters involved, male and female, the series incorporates into its narrative layout the very question of a gendered audience, thus reappraising what Robyn Warhol calls nonsexual affectivity, unraveling “the assumptions that have kept gender and sexuality on the periphery of narrative theory” (15). As a matter of fact, *the affair* itself is introduced as a kind of twist in the straightforward narrative line of a marriage, that can modify, as it happens in the series, its relation as a subplot to the main story, by turning it into a manifold echo of its consequences.

³ The offices of the physiotherapists actually offer the viewers a semi-parody of a genre which has acquired a substantial space of its own in television palimpsests (think of *In Treatment*, for example) and can be indirectly included in the genres’ encyclopedia hinted at by their authors. The series is so crammed with subthemes that it makes the last season superfluous to my argument, which is the reason I have decided to not include it in my essay.

The plot of *The Affair* develops as a cluster of individual choices, and individual episodes, the rights and wrongs of which constitute the story itself, in what can be considered also as a rewriting of classic Hollywood melodrama, where the visual intensity of film language encouraged storytellers to emphasize the expression of desire and conflict in the characters' body language, an emphasis that *The Affair* develops in quite a different way from televised standards. The history of film melodrama is replete with sexual allusions that can reveal a repressed and perverse normalcy, just as in Douglas Sirk's films of the 1950s. In the TV series written by Sarah Treem and Hagai Levi for Showtime, we are frequently permitted to witness sexual encounters between different characters and sexual intimacy becomes a battlefield in the series and conveys the terms of the negotiations that 'gendered' characters are developing in their relationship.

AUTHORS AND AUTHORSHIP IN *THE AFFAIR*

As we have seen from their ability to create and follow different threads of social, cultural and formal questions, unfolding them within the narrative curves along which the story is shaped, the writers of *The Affair* are to be rightly counted among those scriptwriters who led television studios to consider the relevance of an *auteurist* contribution⁴ to the making of a series, especially if classifiable as "quality drama". This type of TV author, entrusted with the role of the so-called *showrunner*, has completely different claims to an authorial figure as compared to the passionately debated one in the history of cinema, where the attempt to reach the same status as literature led to the proposal of the camera-stylo, a neologism coined by Alexandre Astruc in 1948, whose theoretical aim was to attribute to the camera the literary and symbolic status of the pen. The very idea, however, of defining a role inside the TV system, for a person who controls the development of the series combining writing and other more managerial roles, and always outranking the directors of the episodes, is replete with echoes from the authorial debate in the movie industry. As a token of how deeply concerned *The Affair* is with the matter of authorial recognition, the first episode of the series already thematizes a struggle in this

⁴ The adjective is used in reference to Andrew Sarris's 1962 essay "Notes on the Auteur Theory".

arena, a kind of writerly, metafictional subtheme, which is dramatized in the opposing figures of Noah and Bruce Butler, his father-in-law.

Failure is always lurking behind the American Scene and melodrama heightens its backlash in the narrative structure. In Noah's case, this type of anxiety takes shape as the ambition to become a recognized writer, after the commercial failure of his first book. He works as a teacher but has a dream of becoming a successful writer for two dovetailing reasons, the first being to get it back at his father-in-law. A writer himself, albeit a very successful and commercially thriving one, Bruce never misses the opportunity to criticize Noah's lack of both talent and commitment to his work, constantly reminding him of all the economic support he is giving him to raise his four kids. The other reason for craving to write a best seller has to do precisely with the economic gap between him and his wife and the urge to achieve a position from which his lower social background will no longer be a burden.

The meeting of Noah and Alison, the waitress he will be starting the affair with, happens 'within' the frame of this book, whose edges disturbingly overlap with those of the story itself. Noah's bibliographical research on the history of Montauk and its fishing community purposefully blends with his carnal knowledge of Alison, whose sensuality overwhelms his increasingly loose attachment to family values, offering him an escape from his subordinate position. The book ends up becoming one of the characters in the play, as its presence both as a work in progress and as a finished one dogs the human relations and causes unexpected reactions as the story unfolds. More than anything else, the book's ending is a troublesome issue as we learn from the conversation between Henry, the editor, and Noah, in my opinion a key scene of the first season of the series. They meet after being introduced to each other by Bruce himself, who has been working with Henry for ages and relies on his professional ability to turn Noah into a successful writer. Noah is pressured by the editor about how he can revive a conventional plot such as the affair which is described in his book, and about which he is clearly racking his brain to find a satisfactory answer to, until he comes up with the idea of introducing a murder, which immediately galvanizes the editor. It is precisely at that moment that we start nourishing the impression of a story which is coming to life as we watch it, in such a way that the adjective "writerly", which I have used above to define the theme of Noah's book in the series, can properly acquire the meaning devised by Roland Barthes to distinguish a literature whose goal is to defy readers' expectations from

one that demands no particular effort to be understood. Drawing on Peter Brooks' prediction that the development of melodrama in film studies in the 1970s was paving the way to its future interdisciplinarity,⁵ one cannot but agree on the contention that:

television itself can be a writerly medium, both in the sense of challenging viewer expectations, and in the sense of traditionally privileging the place of the scriptwriter / producer / showrunner, an aspect of television narrative that has come to the attention of even the most dilettante of television viewers through the prominence of an "auteurist" vision of television being used to promote certain premium television offerings. (Shannon Wells-Lassagne 2)

This distinction can be formally applied to TV series, the more *writerly* being those whose viewers are vicariously involved in the process of considering critically the lines of development in a complex narrative structure such as *The Affair*.

The final draft of Noah's book will be prominently displayed on his desk when he and Alison move together into a ramshackle house on the river in Cold Spring, NY, whose owner, Yvonne, happens to be the head of a publishing house who rents the place to writers. The draft tempts Alison to read it in the long idle hours of her incognito stay at the place, but she resists the temptation in compliance with Noah's request not to. In line with the TV series authors' tendency to revisit genres, the forbidden book plays a role which is reminiscent of Gothic novels, where a pursued girl comes across a manuscript in an old manor, containing a true account of her host and revealing his evil side. In this particular scene, the authors have got rid of any literary paraphernalia, but the atmosphere can still strike the viewer as creepy since the affair is already showing cracks for which Noah's novel provides a metonymic counterpart. In the end, Alison will break her promise to Noah and read the book, not in their love nest, but at Yvonne's, who is proofreading it in order to better advise Noah as to the end of the story. Yvonne's proofreading makes her change her mind about Alison, whom she had hired as a kindred spirit to be her assistant just a few weeks before. In fact, she sends her husband to inform Alison that her help is no longer required. As a reaction, Alison rushes to their mansion and, since there is no one at home, she bursts into Yvonne's office

⁵ For further discussion on this topic, see Goldberg (ix-xvi).

and starts flipping randomly through the pages of the draft, picking up words and phrases about 'her' which describe her character as "pure sex" and dwell upon sexual intercourse as the main component in the relationship. She will throw this back in Noah's face later in the second season and it is only then that we will discover that she had actually read it all, including the criminal proceedings into the murder of Scottie.

As a matter of fact, the 'object' book will be staged even more in the series when it finally gets published, receiving approval from both critics and public. Now paragraphs from it will be read by the author in book launches, though the selection is affected by his ex-wife's presence in the public. In one of the two launch scenes we can notice that Noah stops reading the softcore paragraph about his lover that he was supposed to read and abruptly substitutes it for one about memories of his San Francisco years with his ex-wife, who had enjoyed listening to it during the previous launch. This choice does not prevent a young critic, present at the launch, from asking Noah about the allure of pornography in his book, and, even more pointedly, what balance between memoir and autobiography he can claim to have achieved in his novel.

Questions like these could find a rightful place in an academic essay about the series, such as this one. By making them part of a scene, however, the series shows its metafictional awareness. No one can expect a series about an affair to be naïve and incapable of relating its content to a cultural background which has to be, Hamlet-style, re-mirrored for a contemporary audience. *The Affair* goes one step beyond this and provides a new take on the theme by mischievously underplaying the issues of sexual misdemeanors nominally inherent in an affair and highlighting what is related to economic, gender and national matters rather than to the private and socially exclusive sphere it is usually connected to.

The book stands as an intermedial perspective on Noah and Alison's affair, having been 'written' by each of the partners whose personal version of the story is shown in specific chapters of many an episode, and, progressively including the other characters mainly affected by the affair. The fictionality of the book, though, is claimed by Noah as clear evidence of how untenable any literal match is between what 'really' happens and the novel. This standpoint is claimed by Noah in quite different circumstances, such as his editorial controversy with Henry about the ending of the novel and his fight with Alison at the yoga center, showing that he is aware of having an ace up his sleeve both professionally and in personal life. This defense of the author's freedom

to draw on his life in order to write fiction, however, as much as it raises philosophical and narratological issues, audaciously verging on the authorial domain of *autofiction*, can lead to disturbing conjectures about the story we are watching on screen. Noah's attitude to the affair is, in fact, ultimately tainted by this idea, whereby we are led to believe, on the one hand, that the affair has given him the necessary spur to write a novel about it while, on the other, he deludes himself into perceiving it as a fictional interlude in his ordinary life. This being said, however, there could be the legitimate chance that Noah has made up his mind to find a solution to the affair impasse through its fictional rewriting, as the repeated doubts cast on its ending suggest. Once the functional device of the book reaches its climax and, above all, when Alison successfully manages to get rid of her fictional alter ego by telling Noah that they are not in a book (which is physically true) and that he cannot dispose of her as he wishes, it's Noah who gets unexpectedly entangled in a plot twist which turns him into a character of a completely different type of fiction: the legal-thriller. The title of his novel, *The Descent*, foreshadows Noah's touching the depth of his traumatic experience as a young man and surfacing again in his mature life.

Noah's book is, therefore, in a constant interaction between the characters and the audience as a living part of the plot, mostly, as said above, in the first two seasons of the series. Literature, however, plays a much wider role in the texture of the series, not only as a professional item in the character's life, since he teaches English and American literature in high schools, but also as a connecting device in transitional passages inside some key episodes, which is worth discussing. The connection, actually, is twofold, and it is better to comment on this before moving on. On the one hand, there are meaningful references to literary masterpieces Noah is discussing with his students, bringing to the fore an ensuing twist in the plot of the series and providing an insight into its motives; on the other hand, Noah's conversations with both his literary agent and his psychotherapist (two sides of the same coin in terms of heightening the viewers' expectations) involve references to representative but critically uneven authors from the American literary canon. The kind of medial relationship for this way of bringing up literature and literary references is not covered theoretically by adaptation studies or cultural studies and requires a formulation of its own, which I will try to articulate through the analyzed examples.

THE AFFAIR'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LITERATURE AND THE AMERICAN CANON.

The first 'transitional' literary reference is to *Romeo and Juliet*, whose names are synonymous with the idealized couple they embody in the collective imagination, during one of Noah's classes where Shakespeare's tragedy is a topic for discussion. He asks students to share their views about the reason why the play, though beginning as a comedy, turns abruptly into a tragedy. One of the pupils says that it's the old people's fault, namely the nurse and the friar, who mess up things, and Noah enthusiastically endorses her hint, rounding it up with the inclusion of all the adults in the play, who hinder the couple's union. This contrast between adolescence and adulthood is not to be found in *The Affair*, at least not where its two protagonists are concerned, but some undercurrent connection still holds, mostly in the tenet that a "couple is heroic because it defies the world and its institutions, starting from its first social cluster: family" (Fusillo 19; my translation).

Both Noah and Alison defy the institution of family, although they come from quite a different set of circumstances. Noah is a family man with four children, a loving wife and two caring in-laws, though it won't be long before we discover how bad things really are; Alison is shattered by the pain of having lost her six-year-old only child and her acceptance into the healing nest of her husband's family comes just on the brink of collapse. The affair between Noah and Alison acts definitively as a trigger for the issues that both families are forced to face, related to unfulfilled ambitions, personal disappointments and unresolved traumas. But they also regain, through the affair, a sense of freedom and disentanglement from social ties, that gives them a second chance to be youthful and carefree. Moreover, the relationship between their families turns to hatred when Whitney, Noah's older daughter, is almost raped by Cole's brother, Scottie, and Martin, Noah's older boy, says he would rather stay with Cole, after helping him with a voluntary job during summer, taking care of horses in their stables, thus calling into question Noah as a father figure.

Hence, the Shakespearian connection gets clearer and comparisons more likely to hold. The reference to Shakespeare's play, by the way, cannot be labeled just as a quote from the most adaptable and iconic playwright in the world, but takes on a structural role in warning the viewer that comedy, the joyful experience of love at first sight that Noah and Alison are sharing, is

going to have a tragic epilogue. The adjective transitional, therefore, refers to a change in the plot that the literary reference anticipates in the narrative in a proleptic mode which is unconventional in serialized narratives.

A further example of what I have called transitional reference happens later in the series. Noah is given a temporary refuge by Helen in her basement when she finds him in a state close to a mental breakdown in his father's home, after being released from prison. Nobody else knows about it but Vik, who has to put up with the intolerable situation just for one day. During dinner, the younger boy in the family, Trevor, is telling how much he is enjoying reading *Jane Eyre*, as he wants to know the whole story of the play that they are putting on stage at school. A noise comes from the basement and Trevor comments on it, saying it must be Bertha Mason, and ironically substituting the attic for the basement in his quotation from Charlotte Brontë's Victorian novel. The ironic reversal concerns the gendered position of his father as well, whose suffering from mental instability is caused by similar reasons to those responsible for Bertha Mason's having become a lunatic, i.e., too long a confinement in the chartered space of a hostile place. As a matter of fact, Noah is haunted by the nightmarish figure of one of his jailers, a former schoolmate who resents Noah's success as a writer and cannot forgive him for criticizing their former hometown in his novel. Driven by his obsession, Noah will conjure up his pursuer in the basement and fight with him to survive. Even in this case the literary reference hints at something happening in the episode, though on a smaller scale from that in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Besides Shakespeare, both Victorian and classic literature has certainly provided television storytelling with one of the most resourceful narrative patterns ever, so much so as to make it a commonplace that TV series' prolonged form of narration can only be compared to the breadth of classic novels, like Charles Dickens', that always appeared in serial form in periodicals. *The Affair*, though, does not invite us to search for a literary model that could have supplied the writers with an outline of diegetic development. Rather, this series contains plenty of direct and indirect references to literary texts and authors and revolves around Noah's book in such an extensive way as to change paradigmatically the relation to literature and to engage the literary work in the same narrative struggle as other modifying factors.

The series is literally crammed with references to canonical texts of American and English literature. Their 'appearance' in the series is specifically organized according to the age of the protagonists, starting from Barrie's *Peter Pan* that

Alison reads to her dead son while visiting his tomb on his birthday in the first episode. When she meets Noah at the library in Montauk, she proudly shows him a picture from a book of local history where her grandfather is standing close to a big fish in a Hemingway-like pose that recalls *The Old Man and the Sea*, with another, implicit, reference also ranking as juvenile literature. Later in the series, Alison will quote a book title when she is asked by Yvonne, the publisher, about her reading habits, and replies that she is not much into reading, mentioning *A Catcher in the Rye* as the last book that she remembers reading. The inclusion of Salinger's problematic novel, in terms of its belated acceptance into the American literary canon because of the mixed reception it received, cannot be casual in connection with her character, whose controversial features and rebellious attitude find a meaningful correspondence in Holden Caulfield's reactions to the American lifestyle.

Most of the authors' names are mentioned in Noah's presence, as he has a double bind relationship to literature, both as a high school teacher and as a professional writer. Many episodes show Noah discussing books and plays in a classroom, in an array that spans titles of English literature, from Shakespeare, as we have discussed above, to Orwell and Waugh, understandably included in the school syllabus but narratively linked to a change in the storyline. Orwell, for example, comes into play with his *Animal Farm* where an Afro-American student writes an essay on Orwell's novel and the racial theme, that I mentioned above, comes to the fore. Writers' names surfacing in the plot must always be considered as being representative of a narrative device to shift our focus on to a new theme. Are the TV authors doing this to rehab the teacher's profession that Noah never gives up in the series, offering him the opportunity to regain the educational role he could have had in his family? Maybe, but what I posit here is that *The Affair* contributes to reshaping the role of literature and authors in writing the television narrative. This issue is better dealt with by considering how literary references are made in relation to Noah as a writer.

I have already commented on his conversations with Henry, the literary agent. On that occasion, talking about the kind of book he has in mind, Noah sums up the plot as the meeting of a country girl with a city boy against the background of the collapse of the *American Pastoral*. The reference to Philip Roth will be repeated during a party given to celebrate the release of Noah's book, *The Descent*. Roth is a thorny name to be mentioned because of the atmosphere of alleged moral reproach his name is doomed to evoke,

something that will soon happen to Noah and the pornographic allure of his book. During a second conversation with Henry, when they discuss about the ending of the novel, the agent supports his preference for the murder by naming Steinbeck and the same epic tone permeating *Of Mice and Men*, that he perceives in Noah's novel and that would be drastically undermined if the novel ended with a dinner full of unspoken implications, such as Noah opts for. A quote from their dialogue can be helpful in focusing this ironic flirting with the idea of a literary canon discussed in a TV series:

N.: Murder, it's... it's... it's salacious. It's... it's cheap. It...

H.: Well, it doesn't have to be. Have you read *Of Mice and Men*?

N.: Is that a rhetorical question?

H.: Well, you may want to review it. The murder at the end of that book felt surprising while it was happening and completely inevitable in retrospect. Like all great endings in literature.

N.: So what are you saying, you won't publish it if I don't change the ending?

H.: I'm not saying that.

N.: 'Cause, you know, as generous as that advance you got me was, I still only got a fifth of it.

H.: That's because that's how advances work. You'll get the next part when you submit the final draft.

N.: This is the final draft.

H.: Maybe you should take another pass at the end. No, just one more pass.

N.: Oh, God.

H.: Okay, maybe I should be more articulate about what I did appreciate in this draft. I thought bringing the feud to the foreground of the earlier chapters worked beautifully. There's something almost epic in the way that you now depict that family, those four brothers...

N.: "Almost"?

H.: It's got a real *East of Eden* feel to me.

N.: What is it with you and Steinbeck today?

H.: And I love the way that you introduced Lana. And I gotta ask, how much of this is based on what happened between you and, um, what's her actual name?

N.: It's fiction, Harry.⁶

⁶ Dialogues from *The Affair* are online and their web address, which I accessed on the 19 October 2021, is: <<https://transcripts.foreverdreaming.org>>.

By naming Steinbeck and *East of Eden*, the agent is indirectly attributing to Noah's work a role to be played among those representative texts that can or would aspire to become the Great American Novel since the term was coined in 1868 to define a novel thought to embody the American national character. Though harshly criticized for having attempted it when it was released in 1952, Steinbeck's novel was imagined by his author as a literary picture of the American soul. Actually, Noah doesn't sound flattered by the association; in fact, he is annoyed by it, as if he resented his agent for revealing a compulsory literary influence. His reaction somehow mirrors what the authors of the TV series would say if asked to comment on Steinbeck, or any other big name, as one of their literary sources for the series. Another conversation about the same topic and with similar authorial reflections will follow, this time with a publisher, Yvonne, who, after avidly reading the unfinished draft by Noah, claims that the ending should not be a structural problem if the novel has been built on solid ground. In fact, she assumes that the epilogue should flow spontaneously from the plot, as if dispossessing the author of his control, whereupon Noah skeptically replies that it has never happened to him.

Against the background of such a highly collaborative medium as narrative television, Yvonne's assumption sounds particularly crucial to the question of authorship as it metonymically underlines the difficulty of ascribing the series to a single author. Obviously, here she is talking about a book, but, as discussed above, Noah's book is made of the same stuff as the series, so much so that the literary agent cannot help asking him how much of Alison is in the female protagonist of his novel (a question which Noah answers with a blunt "It's fiction, Henry"). The choice of a writer as the main character in the series could be interpreted as a thematic incursion into the world of book publishing, as Liam O'Brian has brilliantly discussed in his blog entries: "This is why I (try to) watch every show that even remotely depicts book publishing—precisely because they are all wildly inaccurate, hilariously exaggerated, and, therefore, great." (November 23, 2015). I am more inclined to interpret it by resorting to the reception theory, as more linked with the relevance of the viewer's perception that narrative television implies.

There is a rather problematic issue in reception theory regarding the category of the *implied authorship*, which has been more accurately envisioned and defined by Wayne Booth in his literary approach, as a figure of speech that overcomes the problem of the distinction between the biographical and the virtual author in any given work of fiction. In film studies, Seymour Chatman

argues that the *implied author* is the source of a narrative's origination and the agent whose responsibility is the overall design, a definition that applies as well to the origin of creative vision and the managerial handling of writers for television. Though 'dispossessed' by visual studies scholars such as David Bordwell and Jason Mittell,⁷ as they have judged the construct negligible in the analysis of film and television products, the *implied author* can help us better understand the character of Noah as an intersectional construct, since he belongs – as a character – to the fiction of TV serials, but his role is strongly shaped on an authorial *mise en abyme*, by making him the creator of a fiction based on his affair with Alison. Corroborating this option, the series shows how Alison is affected by Noah's novel and even rebukes him for considering her as just a figment of his possessive imagination, something she would definitely like to be free from as it poisons all her attempts to have a serious and responsible relationship.

By staging his unwanted presence, Treem and Levi are quite unconsciously calling forth a problematic authorial figure that is more linked to the film genre and its melodramatic role as a cornerstone in the history of media. *The Affair* is a series where the literary model of a single, gifted author is dramatized in a fictional affair, which happens to become functional to his reconsideration of life concerns. On one hand, in Noah's behavior we can recognize the role played in his profession by a series of elements usually minimized in the conception of a literary author, such as publishing and intertextual influence, not to mention the canonizing lure that he, alternatively, follows or shuns in shaping his book. On the other hand, through Noah's melodramatic experience the writers of the series put their authorial branding functions to the test, using them as an implement to include a vast array of thematic developments which do not always 'flow spontaneously' through the plot, and hence, maybe involuntarily, but nonetheless meaningfully, dramatize the open debate about how many themes a narrative (and an audience) can bear in TV complex series.

⁷ For further discussion on implied author in television in reference to Bordwell, see Mittell (106-108).

WORKS CITED

- Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Chion, Michel. *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*. Ed. Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Double Indemnity*. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1944.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on Family Melodrama". *Imitations of Life. A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 68-92.
- Foolish Wives*. Dir. Erich Von Stroheim. Universal Pictures, 1922.
- Fusillo, Massimo. *Eroi dell'amore. Storie di coppie, seduzioni e follie*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2021.
- Gledhill, Christine, and Linda Williams, ed. *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media and National Cultures*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Goldberg, Jonathan. *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- In Treatment*. Created by Hagai Levi, Ori Sivan and Nir Bergman. HBO. 2008-2021. Television.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Lancers, Susan, and Robyn Warhol, ed. *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015.
- Maggitti, Vincenzo. "Il duplice 'esilio' di Erich von Stroheim". *Lo sguardo esiliato. Cultura europea e cultura americana fra delocalizzazione e radicamento*. Ed. Cristina Giorcelli e Camilla Cattarulla. Napoli: Loffredo Editore, 2008. 247-68.
- Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV. The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- O'Brien, Liam. "The greatest TV show ever made about book publishing". November 23, 2015, Melville House. 30th September 2021 <<https://www.mhpbooks.com/the-greatest-tv-show-ever-made-about-book-publishing-is-the-affair>>

Rashomon. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Daiei Motion Picture, 1950.

The Affair. Created by Sarah Treem and Hagai Levi. Showtime. 2014-2019. Television.

The Wire. Created by David Simon. HBO. 2002-2008. Television.

Wells-Lassagne, Shannon. "Literature and series", *TV/Series*: 12, 2017, Online 20 September 2017, 20 October 2021 <<http://journals.openedition.org/tvseries/2249>>

Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revised". *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*. Ed. Nick Browne. Berkeley: and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1998.

_____. *On The Wire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

The English Influence on Dubbed TV Series: The Case of *Modern Family*

VINCENZA MINUTELLA

I. INTRODUCTION

Films and TV series are an important vehicle through which foreign cultures can influence our culture. American TV series dubbed into Italian can exert a great cultural and linguistic impact on young audiences, who may mimic the way their favourite TV characters behave and speak. Moreover, some scholars have argued that TV series might be more prone to source language interference and translation mistakes compared with feature films (see Alfieri, Contarino and Motta 131). In Italy, several scholars have commented on the low quality of dubbed TV series, highlighting several calques and unnatural expressions used in the Italian dialogues which are due to English-language interference (Alfieri, Contarino and Motta; Motta “Apporto” and “Diachronic”; Sileo “Doppiaggio” and *Doppiaggese*; Minutella “Dacci”). Previous studies on Anglicisms and calques in Italian dubbing and in TV language have focused on TV series such as *Beverly Hills 9010* (Brincat), *Beautiful* and *Centovetrine* (Sileo “Doppiaggio”, *Doppiaggese*), *E.R.* and *Beautiful* (Alfieri, Contarino, Motta), *Fame* and *Glee* (Minutella “Dacci”), animated films (Minutella “Direct”, “Wow”), the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue* (Pavesi *Traduzione*,

“Translational”, “Reappraising”; Freddi; Pavesi and Zanotti forthcoming). Several BA and MA dissertations have investigated TV series such as *Supernatural*, *Una mamma per amica*, *Breaking Bad*, *Gossip Girl*.

The aim of this article is to explore the English influence on the Italian language of dubbed TV series, focussing on the specific case study of *Modern Family* (2009-2020). This series has been chosen because it portrays several members of an extended American family in their daily interactions, in informal situations where family bonds and relationships are important. The language used closely resembles spontaneous conversation. Its popularity among young people and its extensive use of verbal and situational humour also contribute to making the series interesting from a cultural and linguistic point of view.

The English language influence on dubbed Italian will be examined by detecting the presence of linguistic elements such as Anglicisms (i.e. direct English borrowings such as *star*, *spoilerare*, *smoking*), as well as calques and translational routines deriving from literal translations (Pavesi *Traduzione*; Rossi *Linguaggio*; Motta “Apporto”, “Diachronic”; Sileo “Doppiaggio”, *Doppiaggese*, among others). The article will explore the presence of Anglicisms, calques and translational routines in the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family*. The study will focus specifically on the translation of salient linguistic characteristics of audiovisual dialogue - some elements typical of spoken language and of telecinematic dialogue such as the discourse markers *okay/okay?*, *wow*, *yeah*, *I mean*, expressions such as *you know what?*, *oh my God!*, address forms such as the familiarisers *man*, *mate*, *buddy*, *dude*, *pal*. The presence of some calques and translational routines often quoted in the literature on *dubbese* will be investigated. These are *amico* (from ‘man’), *realizzare* (from ‘realize’), *dacci un taglio* (from ‘cut it out’), *voglio dire* (from ‘I mean’), *già* (from ‘yeah’), *lascia che ti dica/spieghi* (from ‘let me tell you/explain/say’), *oh mio Dio* (from ‘oh my god’), *sai (una) cosa?* (from ‘you know what?’) (Pavesi, *Traduzione* 49, “Translational”, “Reappraising”; Rossi 309-311; Bucaria; Motta “Apporto”, “Scena”, “Diachronic”; Minutella “Dacci”, “Wow”; Sileo “Doppiaggio”, *Doppiaggese*). By analysing episodes from the same series released and translated in different years, a further aim of this study is to assess whether any significant differences in terms of Anglification can be observed in dubbing through the years. The paper will thus also attempt to investigate whether the number and frequency of English loanwords increases over time.

As regards the methodology adopted, the study is based on the analysis of a small corpus of television dialogue consisting of 10 episodes from the TV

series *Modern Family* randomly selected from seasons 1 to 5 (2009-2013). In order to gather quantitative and qualitative data, the episodes as released on the streaming platforms *Netflix* and *Disney Plus* were watched several times and their English and Italian dubbed dialogues were transcribed orthographically.¹ 220 minutes of television dialogue were transcribed and analysed. The collected texts were transcribed in a table (to compare the English dialogues and the dubbed Italian dialogues), but were also divided into two sub-corpora. The English dialogue sub-corpus is made up of 34,725 words, while the dubbed Italian dialogue sub-corpus consists of 30,859 words. Each corpus (*Modern Family_2009-2013_En* and *Modern Family_2009-2013_Ita*) was uploaded to *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff *et al.* 2004). The written transcriptions and the episodes were then examined in order to detect the presence of evident English elements such as Anglicisms, and of more subtle English influence through calques. Anglicisms were detected manually, by watching the episodes and reading the transcriptions. On the other hand, calques and translational routines were detected reading the transcriptions and through the concordance function in the *Sketch Engine*. The calques and translational routines under analysis were selected from among those which are often quoted in the literature on *dubbese*.²

The term *dubbese* usually carries negative connotations indicating the ‘unnatural’ language of dubbing which is created through literal translations and which does not ‘sound natural’ to an Italian ear. Rossi defined *dubbese* as “la lingua tipica del doppiaggio, ritenuta una forma d’italiano ibrida tra falsa colloquialità ricca di calchi e stereotipi, pronuncia impeccabile e formalismo” (Rossi 636). Nevertheless, some scholars consider *dubbese* as a specific language variety, i.e., the language of dubbing, without adding any quality judgements. *Dubbese* is neutrally defined by Bucaria as “the language variety used in dubbed audiovisual texts” (151). Pavesi has pointed out that *dubbese* has specific features, regardless of the languages involved. The language trends of *dubbese* in various languages are “geographical undifferentiation, register and style neutralization, less textual cohesion,

¹ I would like to thank Chiara Grasso for transcribing the episodes in English and in Italian.

² On Anglicisms and calques in Italian dubbing, with an ironic and exaggerated approach, see also the video clip by AIDAC «Un dialogo possibile?» <<https://aidac.it/documenti/audio-video/>> and <https://aidac.it/images/pdf/crusca_relazione.pdf> (Intervento di Filippo Ottoni all’Accademia della Crusca).

lexical permeability to the source language, repetitive use of formulae” (Pavesi, “Spoken” 81). Pavesi also considers the language of dubbing/*dubbese* as constituting a third language or third norm (Pavesi *Traduzione*, “Spoken”, “Reappraising”, “Translational”). It is a language variety in its own right, with specific features, due to its being a translated language constrained by the need for synchronisation with the images and with the mouth and body movements of the characters. Since dubbed language must match the length of the original language and articulation of the mouth of the original actors/characters, translation choices are often affected by synchronisation. As pointed out by Pavesi, “translation for dubbing is highly constrained by various types of synchronization, which will automatically impose a strong dependence exactly on the make-up of the ST” (“Spoken” 91). This may lead to the presence of Anglicisms and literal translations, or translation solutions having a similar articulation of the mouth as that of the original words/expressions. Moreover, the language of dubbing has been found to contain so-called translational routines, which are defined by Pavesi as “recurrent solutions to translation problems which tend to become overextended” (Pavesi, “Spoken” 94; see also Pavesi, “Translational”).

Before moving on to the analysis, Anglicisms and calques will be briefly described. In this paper we will adopt a narrow definition of Anglicism as “a word or idiom that is recognizably English in its form (spelling, pronunciation, morphology, or at least one of the three), but is accepted as an item in the vocabulary of the receptor language” (Görlach 1). Scholars have identified different types of Anglicisms: non-adapted, adapted, false, and hybrid Anglicisms (see Pulcini *et al.*; Furiassi). Non-adapted Anglicisms are English words which keep their original form (i.e. *sport*, *chat*), adapted Anglicisms are adapted according to the morphology of the borrowing language (e.g. *sportivo*, *chattare*), false Anglicisms have an English form but are used with a different meaning or do not exist at all in the English language (e.g. ‘smoking’ as an item of clothing does not exist in English, its equivalent being ‘smoking jacket’). Calques or loan translations reproduce the foreign word (its form and meaning or only its meaning) with Italian elements, through various processes. Calques can be semantic (‘*realizzare*’ from ‘to realise’), lexical (‘*amico*’ from ‘man’), syntactic (‘*Buon fine settimana*’ from ‘Have a nice weekend’) (see Pulcini, “Italian” 151-167).

2. THE TV SERIES *MODERN FAMILY*

Modern Family is a family comedy created by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, produced by 20th Century Fox television and screened in the USA by Abc, available in Italy first on the TV channels *Fox life* and *Italia 1*, then aired on the streaming platforms *Netflix* and *Disney+*. It consists of 11 seasons, for a total of 250 episodes lasting 22 minutes each. It is a sitcom belonging to the genre of the ‘mockumentary’, i.e., a fake documentary where the protagonists often speak directly to the camera, commenting on events and their feelings, as if they were addressing the documentary maker. The series follows the life of a modern American family living in L.A. The members of the family are the father Jay (with his young second wife Gloria, who is Colombian, and her son Manny), Jay’s daughter Claire (and her own family, made up of her husband Phil and their three children Haley, Alex and Luke), and Jay’s son Mitchell (with his husband Cameron and their adopted daughter Lily). The series thus portrays a gay couple, an interracial couple with a much younger wife, and a heterosexual white couple. Family bonds, relationships and conflicts, as well as prejudices are dealt with in a humorous way. The series won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series.

The Italian version of the series was dubbed by the company Video Sound Service³. Several dialogue writers are the authors of the Italian dialogues and dubbing directors Teo Bellia and Roberto Draghetti alternated to direct the dubbing sessions. Season 1 was translated/adapted by Stefanelle Marrama, Marina Guadagno, Margherita Sestito, Cecilia Gonnelli; season 2 was translated/adapted by Federico Nobili, Margherita Sestito and Cecilia Gonnelli; seasons 3 and 4 were translated/adapted by Gianfranco Amalfitano and Susanna Piferi; seasons 5 and 8 by Susanna Piferi; seasons 6 and 7 by Marina Guadagno and Susanna Piferi; season 9 by Emanuela Acampora; season 10 by Susanna Piferi, Ilaria D’Ottavi and Giulia Buffa; season 11 by Giulia Buffa. This alternation and multitude of dialogue writers is typical of the dubbed versions of TV series in Italy.

³ Information about the dubbed version is retrieved from Antonio Genna’s website <<https://www.antonioenna.net/>>.

3. ANALYSIS

The analysis conducted on this TV series focuses on the original and dubbed versions of the episodes and is divided into two parts. An exploration of Anglicisms is followed by an analysis of the way specific features typical of spoken conversation are conveyed in dubbing, detecting the presence (or absence) of calques and translational routines.

3.1. ANGLICISMS IN THE DUBBED VERSION OF *MODERN FAMILY* (2009-2013)

The episodes analysed contain a relatively limited number of Anglicisms. This confirms previous studies on dubbed films, TV series and animated films, which pointed out that Italian dubbing is definitely not ‘invaded’ by English words and expressions and that, when Anglicisms are used in dubbing, there is a tendency to choose words which are already known and accepted in the vocabulary of the Italian language and attested in dictionaries (Brincat; Pavesi, *Traduzione*; Ferro and Sardo; Minutella, “Fingerprints”, “Dacci”, “Direct”, “Wow”). The only English items which are quite frequent in the dubbed episodes are the pragmatic Anglicisms *okay* and *wow*. *Okay* and *wow* are the only Anglicisms with more than 10 occurrences in the episodes analysed. All the other English words found in the Italian dialogues have a very low frequency. This again confirms previous studies on other genres (Pavesi, *Traduzione*; Minutella, “Direct”, “Wow” among others).

3.1.1. *OKAY*

The most frequent Anglicism in the dubbed dialogues is *Okay*. It is used in all the episodes and it is the only Anglicism which is repeated several times by different characters. Everybody uses it. This comes as no surprise, since this word has become pervasive in the Italian language. Moreover, in the original English dialogues ‘okay’ is one of the most frequent words, with an absolute frequency of 265 (the item was found 265 times in the English dialogues corpus). In the dubbed dialogues there are 168 occurrences of *okay*. It is uttered in all the episodes, where it is used by various characters and with different functions. In the dubbed dialogues ‘*okay*’ is a pragmatic discourse

marker functioning both as a response form – *okay* – and as a response elicitor – *okay?* However, it is also used as an adjective in the expression “*è tutto okay? – non è tutto okay*” (from the typical English expressions “*Are you okay/ You okay/Everything okay?*”). The findings in this corpus confirm previous studies on animated films, i.e., that the most productive and widespread English element in Italian dubbing (as in Italian spontaneous conversation) is ‘okay’. However, the English ‘okay’ is not always kept in the Italian dubbed dialogues. Alternative solutions are pragmatic equivalents such as *d'accordo*, *sì*, *sentì*, *certo*, *allora* and omission or zero translation. *Okay* is also sometimes added in the Italian dialogues. This confirms its widespread acceptance as an item in the Italian language. The following examples show the extensive presence of ‘okay’ in the English dialogues and its presence and translation in the Italian dubbed version. Example 1 contains the Anglicism and an Italian pragmatic equivalent (*d'accordo*), in example 2 the three occurrences of ‘okay’ as an adjective are retained twice and once translated with a functional equivalent (*niente affatto*), while in example 3 the response form is kept.

Example 1

Original version	Dubbed version
<MITCHELL> Okay , Cam, I'm sorry that I blamed it all on you, okay?	<MITCHELL> D'accordo , Cam, scusa se ho dato la colpa a te, okay?

Example 2

Original version	Dubbed version
<PHIL> Are you okay ? <WOMAN> Yes. <CLAIRE> Actually, not okay . Not okay .	<PHIL> È tutto okay ? <WOMAN> Sì. <CLAIRE> No, non è tutto okay , niente affatto .

Example 3

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> Okay , we gotta hit the road.	<CLAIRE> Okay , dobbiamo muoverci.

3.1.2. Wow

Wow is the second most frequent Anglicism in the dubbed dialogues. This interjection occurs 26 times in the English original version and 16 times in the Italian dubbed version. Sometimes *wow* is added in Italian when the interjection is absent in the English original dialogue. However, alternative solutions to translate the English *wow* are Italian expressions of surprise such as *cavolo*, *oh*, *incredibile*, *fantastico*, *accidenti*, or zero translation/omission. This suggests that, although the Anglicism is used in dubbing, there is not a fixed choice and Italian words having the same pragmatic function or the strategy of omission are also used by dubbing professionals. The examples below show some of the solutions adopted in Italian dubbing.

Example 4 (Anglicism)

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> Wow! Dylan, I didn't know you could paint.	<CLAIRE> Wow , non sapevo che dipingessi.

Example 5 (omission)

Original version	Dubbed version
<HALEY> Wow! Oh, my goodness.	<HALEY> Oh, che meraviglia.

Example 6 (Italian pragmatic equivalent)

Original version	Dubbed version
<DEDE> Oh, wow . I am not prepared for this.	<DEDE> Oh, cavolo , non ero preparata a questo.

Example 7 (Italian pragmatic equivalent)

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> to Mitchell Oh, wow . When was the last time we talked under a table?	<CLAIRE> Oh cavolo . Quanto tempo è che non parlavamo sotto un tavolo?

Example 8 (Italian pragmatic equivalent)

Original version	Dubbed version
<MITCHELL> Wow. That--That looks exactly like Manny.	<MITCHELL> Accidenti, sembra il fratello gemello di Manny, lo sai?

3.1.3. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ANGLICISMS

Analysing the quantity and types of Anglicisms found in the dubbed episodes, some observations can be made. First, Anglicisms appear to be linked to plot and setting. For instance, an episode which shows Cameron as the coach of a football team contains Anglicisms belonging to the specialised field of American football. This again confirms previous studies on dubbed Italian (Brincat; Minutella “Direct” and “Wow”). Secondly, there does not seem to be a major increase in the amount of English loans in dubbing between 2009 and 2013. The first episode analysed (S1: E4, aired in 2009) contains 13 Anglicisms, while the last episode analysed (S5: E9, aired in 2013) contains 12 Anglicisms. No major pattern emerges, since the number of Anglicisms in the ten episodes under analysis oscillates between 7 and 15, depending on the contexts and situations of each episode. For instance, the episode which contains the highest number of direct loans deals with Haley going to college. The average number of Anglicisms per episode (2009-2013) is 11.4. The absence of a rise in Anglification from 2009 to 2013 might be due to the relatively short time span considered in this analysis. Different, more interesting results might emerge if we consider a longer time span, comparing episodes from 2009 with episodes from 2020. In fact, although episodes from the most recent season aired in 2020 were not transcribed for the purposes of this study, some of their dialogues were nevertheless qualitatively analysed. The first three episodes of Season 11 were watched, taking note of the Anglicisms uttered in the dubbed version. Episodes 1, 2 and 3 of Season 11 contain between 18 and 23 Anglicisms. This tentative (and incomplete) comparison may suggest that the quantity of Anglicisms in the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family* has slightly increased in more recent times. Further empirical research based on dialogue transcriptions is necessary in order to provide more reliable quantitative data.

It is also worth noting that as far as American culture is concerned, a trend in dubbing can be observed. In fact, there appears to be a tendency to keep culture-specific references as loanwords, rather than opting for a

domesticating approach which changes elements typical of the American culture into elements belonging to the target Italian culture. This happens for instance with some words referring to food (*waffle, pancake*), titles of film and TV series (*Hunger Games, High School Musical, Footloose, The L Word, My Little Pony*), and the school system ('A' as a mark is retained in the dubbed version, rather than using the Italian marking system; the word *college* is repeated). The example below illustrates this point:

Example 9

Original version	Dubbed version
<MANNY> We both get A's.	Prenderemo una A.

There are also cases in which Anglicisms are added in the dubbed version. A case in point is the example below, where 'look' is added in Italian.

Example 10

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> You don't need to change who you are to fit in with the cool kids.	Non hai bisogno di cambiare look per piacere ai ragazzi.

It is worth noting that a change of meaning also occurs in the above utterance by Claire. The woman is giving some advice to her younger daughter Alex - a very smart but quite antisocial and very serious kid who has just "turned Goth" trying to become friends with a cool girl in her school. Claire's comment on the importance of not changing one's own identity in order to be accepted by popular kids is turned in the Italian dubbed version into a comment on how to be attractive for guys. This translation solution carries ideological implications and skews the mother's character.

3.2. CALQUES AND TRANSLATIONAL ROUTINES IN DUBBED DIALOGUES

This section will investigate whether calques and translational routines such as *amico, realizzare, assolutamente, Oh mio Dio!, Sai (una) cosa?, Lascia che ti dica/chieda una cosa, Già, Voglio dire* and *Dacci un taglio* are used in the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family* (2009-2013).

3.2.1. AMICO < MAN, MATE, DUDE, BUDDY

As regards the prototypical dubbese vocative ‘*amico*’, it only occurs once in the 10 episodes analysed. It is uttered by Jay to a young man he does not know. *Amico* does not translate an English familiariser. It is worth noting that the dialogues of this TV series do not contain any instances of the English vocatives which usually trigger the Italian ‘*amico*’. In fact the familiarisers *man*, *mate* and *dude* are never uttered. On the other hand, *buddy* is used 8 times, but it has various translations: *ragazzi*, *piccolino*, *piccolo*, *bene*, *tieni* – and zero translation/omission.

3.2.2. REALIZZARE < REALIZE

There were no occurrences of the semantic calque ‘*realizzare*’ in the episodes analysed. The 6 occurrences of “realize” were translated as *capire* (2), *pensare* (2), *rendersi conto* (2). This confirms previous studies (Minutella and Pulcini; Minutella, “Dacci”, “Wow”). Although *realizzare* is often mentioned as a prototypical example of dubbese, empirical analysis on animated films and TV series suggests that it is not actually frequently found in dubbed Italian. The following example illustrates the use of ‘*capire*’ to translate ‘realize’.

Example 11

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> So, uh, we realized a couple things up there, and I think apologies are in order.	<CLAIRE> Allora, lassù abbiamo capito un paio di cose e credo proprio che vi dobbiamo chiedere scusa.

3.2.3. ASSOLUTAMENTE < ABSOLUTELY

The episodes analysed contain only 3 occurrences of the adverb ‘absolutely’. In the dubbed version, 3 different translations can be found: *assolutamente*, *assolutamente sì*, *ma certo*. The calqued *assolutamente* is indeed used, but only once, as illustrated in the example below:

Example 12

Original version	Dubbed version
<JAY> We're going up another level. <CLAIRE> Absolutely. Come on.	<JAY> Saliamo di un piano. <CLAIRE> Assolutamente. Forza.

Nevertheless, the more natural *assolutamente sì* and *certo* are also used, which suggests that the invariant *assolutamente* has not replaced the Italian expressions.

Example 13

Original version	Dubbed version
ENG: <CAMERON> Do we have a special bond? Absolutely.	<CAMERON> C'è un legame speciale? Assolutamente sì.

Further research on a larger corpus is needed to draw some conclusions.

3.2.4. (OH,) MIO DIO! < (OH) MY GOD/GOSH!

The mild expletive “Oh, my God” and its variants “My God” and “Oh, God” are quite frequent in the English dialogues. The *Sketch Engine* gives 32 hits for “Oh, my God”, 2 for “My God”, and 13 occurrences of “Oh, God”. The euphemisms “Oh, my gosh” and “Oh, gosh” are also used (7 occurrences). These exclamations are uttered by most of the adult characters (most frequently by women - the teenager Haley, her mother Claire, the younger daughter Alex - but also by Cameron, Mitchell and Phil). In the dubbed version the calque “*Oh mio Dio!*” is mostly resorted to in order to translate the English expression. *Oh, mio Dio!* and *Oh, Dio!* occur 38 times. According to Sileo (*Doppiaggese*, 82-85) more natural Italian expletives would be *Oddio* or *Dio mio*. Alex once says “O santo cielo” (S4: E3). The repetitive use of *Oh mio Dio* in dubbed dialogues, often uttered with a high-pitched voice, becomes a marker of the characters’ speech and of dubbese. The high frequency of this calqued expression in dubbed dialogues might end up influencing the way young people watching the TV series speak. What seems unnatural is also the very high frequency of occurrences of the expression in Italian. Examples 14 to 21 show the extensive and repeated use of ‘*Oh my God/gosh*’ in English, and the prevailing literal translation in Italian dubbing. Some of the examples also contain the alternative translation provided by subtitles, where the more natural ‘*Oddio*’ and ‘*Mamma mia*’ are also resorted to.

Example 14

Original version	Dubbed version	Subtitled version
<p><HALEY> Oh, my God. Yay, it's big! Oh, my God. I love it. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.</p>	<p><HALEY> Oh mio Dio. È enorme. Oh, che meraviglia, lo adoro. È la cosa più bella che abbia mai visto.</p>	<p><HALEY> Mamma mia. È enorme! Oddio, lo adoro. È la cosa più bella che abbia mai visto.</p>

Example 15

Original version	Dubbed version	Subtitled version
<p><MITCHELL> Oh, my God. You guys go to The Lumberyard too?</p>	<p><MITCHELL> Oh mio Dio, anche voi andate alla falegnameria?</p>	<p><MITCHELL> Oh, mio Dio. Frequentate anche voi la Segheria?</p>

Example 16

Original version	Dubbed version	Subtitled version
<p><HALEY> Oh, my God. What is that shirt?</p>	<p><HALEY> Oh mio Dio, che cos'è quella?</p>	<p><HALEY> Oddio, che maglietta hai?</p>

Example 17

Original version	Dubbed version	Subtitled version
<p><HALEY> Oh, my God! Put on a shirt!</p>	<p><HALEY> Oh mio Dio! Rimettila.</p>	<p><HALEY> Oddio! Mettiti una camicia!</p>

Example 18

Original version	Dubbed version
<p><CAMERON> Oh, my God, Mitchell.</p>	<p><CAMERON> Oh mio Dio, Mitchell.</p>

Example 19

Original version	Dubbed version
<CAMERON> Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!	<CAMERON> Oh mio Dio, oh mio dio, oh mio dio!

In the above example the exclamation is repeated with different intonation and pitch three times, when Cameron sees some amazing shirts. In this case the fixed expression is used for characterisation and to convey excessive excitement, and it is therefore repeated also in the dubbed version to highlight Cameron's exaggerated reaction.

Example 20

Original version	Dubbed version
<PHIL> Oh, my gosh. It's us at the market.	<PHIL> Oh mio Dio. Ma siamo noi al supermercato.

Example 21

Original version	Dubbed version
<ALEX> Oh, my God.	<ALEX> Oh, mio Dio.

3.2.5. SAI (UNA) COSA? < (Do) YOU KNOW WHAT?

The fixed phrase 'You know what?', which has the function of turn launcher, is typical of natural spoken conversation and of film and TV dialogue. Romero Fresco commented on it being a set phrase typically used in the English dialogues of the TV series *Friends*, while Freddi considers it a fixed 3-word-cluster which occurs in the English dialogues of two American films which are part of the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue (PCFD)* (Freddi, 106-107). 'You know what?' can thus be considered a fixed expression typical of American telecinematic language. Previous studies have pointed out that it often gives rise to a syntactic calque typical of dubbed Italian, i.e., the stock translation *Sai (una) cosa?* (see Pavesi, *Traduzione* 49; Freddi 106-107).

In the 10 episodes of *Modern Family* analysed ‘You know what?’ is uttered 24 times, by several characters. This confirms that it is a common expression typical of television dialogue mimicking conversation among American speakers. As regards its translation, the calque ‘*sai (una) cosa?*’ is not very frequent, as it occurs only 6 times in the dubbed version. On the other hand, the Italian dubbed dialogues contain more natural-sounding expressions, including omission. Alternative translation solutions found in dubbing are *sentì, tranquillo*, the more natural *sai che ti dico?* (Pavesi, *Traduzione* 49), omission/zero translation, *d'accordo, scusa, ascoltami, aspetta, lui però, io invece, in fondo, ma noi, io non ci casco*. This shows that Italian dialogue writers tend to prefer variation rather than the use of a fixed expression and routinised translation. Nevertheless, by avoiding the calque and the repetition of the fixed expression or formulaic language typical of spoken interaction, the dubbed version loses characterisation since the repetitive use of this expression also contributes to characterisation. However, a fluent and natural sounding Italian dialogue is preferred and the calque appears to be avoided.

The following are some examples of exchanges containing the English fixed expression and showing its various translations.

Example 22

Original version	Dubbed version
<JAY> to Cameron You know what? I'm gonna prove that you won only because I was distracted.	<JAY> Senti , voglio provarti che hai vinto solo perché ero distratto.

Example 23

Original version	Dubbed version
<HALEY> to her parents You know what? I think it's best if you guys get going.	<HALEY> Io invece penso che sia meglio che voi due ve ne andiate.

Example 24

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> And you know what? You made me this way. (S3: E12)	<CLAIRE> E sai una cosa? Tu mi hai fatta diventare così.

Example 25

Original version	Dubbed version
<MITCHELL> Right. You know what , Cam? Why don't I just take Lily to preschool on my way to work? (S3: E2)	<MITCHELL> Sai una cosa , Cam? Posso portarla io all'asilo mentre vado al lavoro.

The following examples are extracted from a conversation between Cameron and Mitchell about the fact that their daughter Lily must get less attached to Cameron. Cameron finds the idea of not taking Lily to pre-school and not doing things with her really hard. The expression 'you know what?' occurs several times and it is translated in different ways.

Example 26

Original version	Dubbed version
<CAMERON> You're right. You know what? It's gonna be a great day.	<CAMERON> Sì hai ragione, scusa . Sarà un gran giorno.

Example 27

Original version	Dubbed version
<CAMERON> Okay. You know what , Lily, sweetie? I know this is gonna be difficult-	<CAMERON> Okay, ascoltami Lily, tesoro. So che sarà difficile.
<LILY> Bye!	<LILY> Ciao.
<CAMERON> Okay . That was a knife to the heart.	<CAMERON> Okay , peggio di una coltellata.
<MITCHELL> No, it's-it's a good thing. Come on.	<MITCHELL> No va bene così, andiamo.
<CAMERON> Oh, you know what? She forgot her snack.	<CAMERON> No, aspetta , ha lasciato la merenda.

Example 28

Original version	Dubbed version
<WOMAN> Okay, you know what? He's trying to be nice, and you just called him Sally.	<DONNA> Okay, lui però sta cercando di essere gentile e tu lo chiami Sally?

Example 29

Original version	Dubbed version
<MITCHELL> You know what? It was nice of you to offer. (S4: E3)	<MITCHELL> Sai una cosa? Grazie dell'offerta.

Although '*Sai una cosa?*' is seldom used in the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family*, it is among the translation solutions for 'you know what?'. Moreover, it can be considered a translational routine since it is also inserted in dubbing without the English trigger 'You know what?' In fact, in season 4, episode 3 Cameron says "Why don't you call my dad?", which becomes "Sai una cosa? Chiama mio padre".

These quantitative data on the 10 episodes analysed corroborate previous studies by Freddi and Pavesi (*Traduzione*), since natural Italian solutions are not supplanted by the literal translation of the English expression. This seems to contrast with Sileo's findings that '*sai una cosa?*' "sembra ricorrere molto spesso nel linguaggio cine-televisivo adattato dall'inglese" and that the calque is replacing the Italian '*Sai che c'è?*' and '*Sai che ti dico?*' (Sileo, *Doppiaggese* 98, 99). Nevertheless, research focussing on more recent episodes of the series is needed in order to ascertain whether contemporary dubbed dialogues of this series contain more occurrences of the calqued fixed expression.

3.2.6. 'LASCIA CHE TI DICA/CHIEDA QUALCOSA/UNA COSA' < 'LET ME TELL/ASK YOU SOMETHING'

No occurrences of the structural calque 'lascia che ti dica/chieda qualcosa/una cosa' were found in the dialogues analysed. The examples below illustrate the

choice of more direct and less formal Italian expressions such as ‘dimmi una cosa’ and ‘ascolta’. They are uttered by adult males to young boys (Manny and Luke).

Example 30

Original version	Dubbed version
<CAMERON> Let me ask you something.	<CAMERON> Dimmi una cosa, Manny.

Example 31

Original version	Dubbed version
<LUKE> Can't imagine you working. <PHIL> Luke, let me tell you something. That is very offensive to women. Your mom works very hard. It's just now she works for us.	<LUKE> Non ti ci vedo che lavori. <PHIL> Luke, ascolta. Così offendi tutte le madri di famiglia. Tua madre lavora sodo, lavora per tutti noi.

3.2.7. *Già* < YEAH

As pointed out by Pavesi, the pair *yeah* - *già* is one of the most frequent translational routines in Italian dubbing (Pavesi, “Aspetti” 137; Bucaria; Sileo, *Doppiaggese*, 92-96; Minutella, “Wow”; see also Pavesi and Zanotti forthcoming). The need for lip synchronization has probably generated this recurrent solution, due to the similar articulation of the mouth of the two words ‘yeah’/‘già’. The English dialogues contain 157 occurrences of ‘yeah’. In the dubbed version, these are rendered with the following words (in order of frequency): *sì*, *certo*, *già*, \emptyset (omission or zero translation). *Già* is used 31 times in the dubbed dialogues as a response form. This shows that although the translational routine *già* is indeed used in the Italian dialogues, other Italian solutions are preferred. Italian dialogue writers opt for variation rather than a fixed, recurrent, repetitive one-to-one equivalence. This again confirms observations made in previous studies on TV series and animated films, that is, that dubbing professionals

aim at avoiding repetitiveness (Minutella “Dacci”, “Wow”). Moreover, the most frequent translation is *sì*, which, as pointed out by Pavesi and Zanotti (forthcoming) “can be posited as functionally the most immediate equivalent of the English *yeah*”. The examples below illustrate the extensive presence of the discourse marker ‘yeah’ in the English dialogues and its varying translations (*sì*, *già*, omission) in the dubbed dialogues. Example 32 also contains an instance of ‘realize’ translated with an Italian verb which is not a calque.

Example 32

Original version	Dubbed version
<MITCHELL> Yeah. I realized that if I was gonna raise a boy, I needed to butch up my life. You know, I wanted to be able to teach my son all the things that my Dad taught Claire.	<MITCHELL> Sì. Mi sono reso conto che se voglio crescere un maschio, devo essere più virile. Insomma devo insegnare a mio figlio tutto quello che mio padre ha insegnato a Claire.

Example 33

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> Mm-hmm. Yeah. I had a pretty crazy day, but it-it had an interesting ending.	<CLAIRE> Mmmh, sì , ho avuto una giornata assurda, ma con un finale interessante.

The following example takes place during a meeting between Mitchell and Cameron (a gay couple) and a lesbian couple who is visiting them so that their children can play and they can try to get along. The two couples do not really get along and are quite embarrassed. The exchange contains several occurrences of ‘yeah’ (5) and ‘I mean’ (2), used as hesitators and fillers. In the dubbed version, ‘yeah’ is translated 3 times with the translational routine *già* and twice omitted. The discourse marker ‘I mean’ is translated once with *sì* and once with *insomma*. The Anglicism *gay* is also used in the dubbed version.

Example 34

Original version	Dubbed version
<WOMAN> Yeah. So glad that we are doing this.	<DONNA> Già , sono talmente contenta.
<MITCHELL> Yeah. Yeah , me too. Yeah.	<MITCHELL> Già, già , anche io.
<WOMAN> I mean , we're the only gay parents in the class.	<DONNA> Si , siamo gli unici genitori gay della classe.
<MITCHELL> Yeah , we should be supporting one another. I mean , we have so much in common.	<MITCHELL> Dobbiamo aiutarci a vicenda. Insomma , abbiamo tanto in comune.

3.2.8. *VOGLIO DIRE* < I MEAN

Instances of the discourse marker *I mean* are translated with the following words and expressions (in order of frequency): *cioè*, *insomma*, *sì*, *visto che*, omission/zero translation, *voglio dire*. Various different solutions are adopted. They are Italian pragmatic equivalents, the word *insomma* (which fits in terms of lip synchronisation) and the syntactic calque *voglio dire*. However, occurrences of the syntactic calque *voglio dire* are less frequent than the more natural Italian solutions. This shows that there is no overuse of the literal translation and that dialogue writers opt for more natural solutions. The quantitative results on *Modern Family* thus corroborate previous findings on animated films (Minutella, “Wow”) and contrast with Rossi’s comment that there is an overuse of ‘*voglio dire*’ in dubbed dialogues (Rossi, *Linguaggio*).

3.2.9. *DACCI UN TAGLIO* < CUT IT OUT

The expression ‘*dacci un taglio*’ only occurs once in the dubbed corpus. Its English trigger is not ‘cut it out’ but rather “let’s just do this”.

3.2.10. A RECENT CALQUE? *DI SEMPRE* < EVER?

After analysing words and expressions which are considered typical of *dubbese*, I decided to investigate the presence of a word combination which is very frequently used in contemporary newspaper articles and in the news, especially about sports, but also in spoken Italian. The prepositional phrase ‘*di sempre*’ may in fact be a recent calque from the English ‘ever’, in expressions such as ‘the best/worst + Noun + ever’ or ‘the most + Adj + ever’. ‘*Di sempre*’ is not mentioned in the literature on *dubbese*. However, it might be the result of an English language influence on Italian through translation, since it is more concise than the Italian expressions that convey the superlative/the same meaning (such as ‘di tutti i tempi, in assoluto, che ci sia mai stato’, etc.) This intuition was confirmed by some recent comments by *Accademia della Crusca* (2016) and the *Treccani* magazine (2018). In 2016 Matilde Paoli on the *Accademia della Crusca* website argued that “in tutte queste espressioni troviamo *ever*, il cui primo significato è appunto ‘sempre’ [...], mentre in italiano sarebbe necessario ricorrere a espressioni diverse: la traduzione con (*di*) *sempre* permette di creare una serie di espressioni parallele a quelle inglesi e ugualmente “economiche”.⁴ As pointed out in the *Treccani* website,

Quel *di sempre* sostitutivo del secondo termine di paragone di un superlativo relativo è entrambe le cose: un calco sull’inglese *ever*, in espressioni come *bigger than ever* ‘più grande di come sia mai stato’; un sistema indubbiamente rapido e conciso con cui all’inizio i giornalisti sportivi, poi i giornalisti in generale e, infine, anche la lingua comune, hanno trovato una scorciatoia per evitare l’articolazione più complessa e ricca costituita dal modulo sintattico normale (e normato). Sostiene Matilde Paoli in una pagina dell’Accademia della Crusca dedicata a questo tema [...]: «Ciò che certamente infastidisce è l’alta frequenza con cui viene usata questa nuova formula a scapito della variazione e dell’originalità che la nostra lingua ci può consentire».⁵

The expression ‘*di sempre*’ is thus calqued on the English ‘ever’, it is shorter than other more natural Italian expressions and therefore might be used in

⁴ <<https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/la-crusca-e-laccademia-italiana-piu-longeva-di-sempre-/1174>>.

⁵ <https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/domande_e_risposte/grammatica/grammatica_1553.html>.

translations where conciseness or the same length as the original version is needed. This might include online newspaper articles as well as subtitled or dubbed versions of audiovisual products. In light of the above comments, I decided to verify how expressions such as ‘the best/worst/most + Noun/Adj + ever’ are translated in the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family*, in order to ascertain whether the expression ‘*di sempre*’ is actually used also in dubbing. Very few occurrences of this construction were found in the 10 episodes analysed. Season 5, episode 9 (*The big game*) contains the superlative expression ironically uttered by Cameron. As illustrated in example 35 below, the dubbed version translates the expression with the calque ‘*più vincente di sempre*’. On the other hand, the subtitled version opts for the more natural Italian expression ‘*di tutti i tempi*’, which is slightly longer.

Example 35

Original version	Dubbed version	Subtitled version
<CAMERON> If I win today that makes three... making me the winningest first-year freshman coach ever .	<CAMERON> Se vinco oggi fanno tre e diventerò l’allenatore del primo anno più vincente di sempre .	<CAMERON> Se vinco oggi, io salgo a tre... e divento il coach di matricole più vittorioso di tutti i tempi .

The choice of ‘*di sempre*’ in dubbing might be due to the need for synchronisation, since the articulation of ‘*di sempre*’ is quite similar to that of ‘ever’, whereas ‘*di tutti i tempi*’ is longer and has a different articulation of the mouth. The above is the only occurrence of ‘*di sempre*’ in the ten episodes analysed. In other episodes, longer but more natural Italian expressions are chosen. For instance, in the following example, from season 1, the superlative is rendered with the expression ‘*del mondo*’.

Example 36

Original version	Dubbed version
<CAMERON> Who warned you that that was the worst idea ever ? Anyone?	<CAMERON> Chi ti aveva detto che era la peggiore idea del mondo ? Qualcuno?

A further occurrence of a superlative with ‘ever’ is translated without resorting to the easy and short calque ‘*di sempre*’. In the example below the sentence containing the superlative is rewritten/adapted in the dubbed version.

Example 37

Original version	Dubbed version
<CLAIRE> Hang on one sec. Okay.	<CLAIRE> Aspetta un secondo.
<PHIL> Is that the funniest thing ever?	<PHIL> Mi fa morire dal ridere.
<CLAIRE> Oh, yeah!	<CLAIRE> Oh si.
<CAMERON> Oh. Oh, my gosh. Mitchell, come here. You have to see what Claire sent us.	<CAMERON> Oh mio dio Mitchell vieni, guarda che ci ha mandato Claire.
<MITCHELL> Okay , wait. One second. Okay.	<MITCHELL> Si , aspetta un secondo. Okay.

The example above contains several linguistic items which are typical of spontaneous conversation and whose translation has been discussed in this article. There are 3 occurrences of ‘okay’ (rendered with omission, *si* and *okay*), the discourse marker ‘yeah’ translated as ‘*si*’, the euphemistic exclamation ‘Oh my gosh’ rendered with the calque ‘*Oh mio Dio*’ and the expression ‘the + superlative + ever’, which is rewritten in Italian.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this article has shown that the dubbed version of *Modern Family* contains a relatively limited presence of Anglicisms and that there was no major increase in the quantity of Anglicisms between 2009 and 2013. There also appears to be a limited presence of calques and translational routines, since the Italian dialogues contain few occurrences of the words and expressions which are often mentioned in studies on *dubbese* as typical markers of translated language conveying an unnatural flavour to the Italian dialogues. The only expression which is very frequent in the dubbed dialogues is *Oh mio Dio!*, which is repeated throughout the episodes by most characters.

Nevertheless, in order to provide a fuller picture of the English influence on dubbed Italian, further research is needed on a much larger corpus. For instance, episodes from seasons 6 to 11 (2013–2020) should be transcribed and analysed in order to ascertain both whether more recent dubbed dialogues are more Anglicised and whether translational routines and fixed expressions such as ‘*oh mio Dio!*’ and ‘*Sai una cosa?*’ are more pervasive in dubbed dialogues in more recent times.

Furthermore, empirical research could benefit from the creation of a parallel Screen English and Italian corpus. The corpus should contain the transcriptions of the English and Italian dialogues of TV series, animated films, and films. This would enable researchers to discover patterns and regularities in both telecinematic English dialogue and dubbed dialogue. A comparison of the patterns that emerge with dictionary definitions and with data from general English and Italian corpora would also provide interesting results. For instance, by investigating corpora of spoken Italian, we could ascertain whether expressions such as ‘*di sempre*’, ‘*Oh mio Dio*’, ‘*sai una cosa?*’, ‘*già*’ and ‘*voglio dire*’, among others, are used in contemporary Italian. A comparison with data from a corpus of Italian films and TV series could also lead to useful insights.

What emerges from this small-scale study on the translation of *Modern Family* is that this series does mimic spontaneous conversation and uses a series of fixed expressions typical of spoken English and that Italian dubbing professionals mostly use a natural-sounding Italian, avoiding calques and excessive repetitions, resorting to various solutions and creativity. This corroborates previous studies (Minutella “Dacci”, “Direct” and “Wow”) and shows that, overall, the quality of the dubbed dialogues of *Modern Family* is good.

WORKS CITED

- Alfieri, Gabriella, Simona Contarino, e Daria Motta. "Interferenze fraseologiche nel doppiaggio televisivo: l'italiano di *ER* e *Beautiful*". *Atti delle giornate di studio sull'interferenza italiano-inglese (Venezia, aprile 2002)*. A cura di Anna Vera Sullam Calimani. Firenze: Cesati, 2003. 127-49.
- Andersen, Gisle. "Pragmatic Borrowing". *Journal of Pragmatics* 67 (2014): 17-33.
- Bollettieri Bosinelli, Rosa Maria. "Tradurre per il cinema". *Manuale di Traduzione dall'inglese*. A cura di Romana Zacchi and Massimiliano Morini. Bologna: Mondadori, 2002. 76-88.
- Brincat, Joseph M. "Il doppiaggio di telefilm americani: una variante tradotta dell'italiano parlato-recitato?" *L'italiano oltre frontiera. 5. Convegno Internazionale, Leuven, 22-25 aprile 1998 (Vol. 1)*. Ed. Serge Valvonsen et al. Leuven/ Firenze: Leuven University Press/Franco Cesati Editore, 2000. 245-58.
- Bucaria, Chiara. "Acceptance of the Norm or Suspension of Disbelief? The Case of Formulaic Language in Dubbese". *Between Text and Image. Updating Research in Screen Translation*. Ed. Delia Chiaro, Christine Heiss and Chiara Bucaria. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008. 149-63.
- Chaume, Frederic. "La pretendida oralidad de los textos audiovisuales y sus implicaciones en traducción". *La Traducción en los medios audiovisuales*. Ed. Rosa Agost and Frederic Chaume. Castellón de la Plana: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2001. 77-87.
- Chaume Varela, Frederic, e Cristina García De Toro. "El doblaje en España: Anglicismos frecuentes en la traducción de textos audiovisuales." *Rivista Internazionale della Tecnica della Traduzione* 6 (2001): 119-37.
- Di Fortunato, Eleonora, e Mario Paolinelli (a cura di). *Barriere linguistiche e circolazione delle opere audiovisive: la questione doppiaggio*. Roma: AIDAC, 1996.
- Duro Moreno, Miguel. "'Eres patético': el Español traducido del cine y de la televisión". *La traducción para el doblaje y la subtitulación*, Madrid: Catedra, Signo e Imagen, 2001. 161-88.
- Ferro, Patrizia, e Rosaria Sardo. "La TV per bambini e per ragazzi". *Gli italiani del piccolo schermo. Lingua e stili comunicativi nei generi televisivi*. A cura di Gabriella Alfieri and Ilaria Bonomi. Firenze: Cesati, 2008. 379-450.
- Forchini, Pierfranca. *Movie Language Revisited: Evidence from Multi-dimensional Analysis and Corpora*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.

- Forchini, Pierfranca. "A Diachronic Study of Familiarizers ('man', 'guys', 'buddy', 'dude') in Movie Language". Ed. Rocío Baños, Silvia Bruti and Serenella Zanotti. Special issue of *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* (2013): 504-25.
- Formentelli, Maicol. "The Vocative *Mate* in Contemporary English: a Corpus-based Study". *Language Resources and Linguistic Theory*. Ed. Andrea Sansò. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2007. 180- 99.
- _____. "Vocatives Galore in Audiovisual Dialogue: Evidence from a Corpus of American and British Films". *English Text Construction*. 7.1 (2014): 53-83.
- Freddi, Maria. "The Phraseology of Contemporary Filmic Speech: Formulaic Language and Translation". *Analysing Audiovisual Dialogue: Linguistic and Translational Insights*. Ed. Maria Freddi and Maria Pavesi. Bologna: CLUEB, 2009. 101-123.
- Furiassi, Cristiano. *False Anglicisms in Italian*. Monza: Polimetrica, 2010.
- Garzone, Giuliana. "Osservazioni sull'assetto del testo italiano tradotto dall'inglese". *L'italiano delle traduzioni*. A cura di Anna Cardinaletti and Giuliana Garzone. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005. 35-57.
- Gellerstam, Martin. "Fingerprints in Translation". *In and Out of English: For Better, for Worse?* Ed. Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005. 201-13.
- Gottlieb, Henrik. "Anglicisms and Translation". *In and Out of English: For Better, for Worse?* Ed. Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005. 161-84.
- _____. "Old Films, New Subtitles, More Anglicisms?" *Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility at the Crossroads. Media for All 3*. Ed. Aline Remael, Pilar Orero and Mary Carroll. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 249-72.
- Herbst, Thomas. "Why Dubbing is Impossible". *Traduzione multimediale per il cinema, la televisione e la scena*. Ed. Christine Heiss and Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli. Bologna: CLUEB, 1996. 97-115.
- Minutella, Vincenza. "'Fingerprints' of English: Lexical and Syntactic Borrowings in Dubbed Italian." *Papers from the 24th AIA Conference. Challenges for the 21st Century: Dilemmas, Ambiguities, Directions*. A cura di Gabriella Di Martino, Linda Lombardo e Stefania Nuccorini. Roma: Edizioni Q, 2011. 121-28.
- _____. "'Dacci un taglio, vuoi?' Anglicisms in Dubbed TV Series, Then and Now". *Ricognizioni* 2.4 (2015): 235-56.
- _____. "Direct Anglicisms in Dubbing in Italy: State of the Art". *English in Italy. Linguistic, Educational and Professional Challenges*. A cura di Cecilia Boggio e Alessandra Molino. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2017. 87-104.

- _____. "Direct Anglicisms in Dubbed Italian: A Preliminary Study on Animated Films." *Lingue Linguaggi* 28 (2018): 193-209.
- _____. "Wow! Ehi, amico. Lascia che ti spieghi... Okay? Già. The English Element in Dubbed Italian. The Case of Animated Films". *Textus* 34.1 (2021): 75-100.
- Minutella, Vincenza, and Virginia Pulcini. "Cross-linguistic Interference into Italian Audiovisual Discourse: The Cases of *Realize*, *Impressive* and *Excited*." *Observing Norms, Observing Usage: Lexis in Dictionaries and the Media*. Ed. Alessandra Molino and Serenella Zanotti. Bern: Peter Lang, 2014. 333-50.
- Modern Family*. Created by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd. 2009-20. ABC. Television.
- Motta, Daria. "L'apporto inglese alla lingua italiana attraverso la fiction doppiata". *Le forme e la storia* 3.1 (2010): 239-44.
- Motta, Daria. "Dalla scena del delitto alla scena del crimine". *L'Italia e i mass media*. Ed. Marco Gargiulo. Roma: Aracne, 2012. 127-42.
- _____. "Diachronic Models of TV Dubbing on Contemporary Italian." *ITALICA* 92 [4](2015): 959-78.
- _____. "Il doppiaggio televisivo come strumento didattico per l'insegnamento dell'italiano LS Dall'adattamento culturale dei testi alla didattica della fraseologia." *Italiano LinguaDue* 1 (2017): 70-82.
- Ottoni, Filippo. "Un dialogo possibile? Video sul 'doppiaggese' presentato da Filippo Ottoni all'Accademia della Crusca". 20 April 2022 <<http://www.aidac.it/index.php/it/documenti/audio-video>>
- Paolinelli, Mario, and Eleonora Di Fortunato. *Tradurre per il doppiaggio. La trasposizione linguistica dell'audiovisivo. Teoria e pratica di un'arte imperfetta*, Milano: Hoepli, 2005.
- Pavesi, Maria. "Aspetti (socio)linguistici del doppiaggio". *Il doppiaggio: trasposizioni linguistiche e culturali*. A cura di Baccolini R. et al. Bologna: CLUEB, 1994. 129-42.
- _____. *La traduzione filmica. Aspetti del parlato doppiato dall'inglese all'italiano*. Roma: Carocci, 2005.
- _____. "Spoken Language in Film Dubbing: Target Language Norms, Interference and Translational Routines". *Between Text and Image. Updating Research in Screen Translation*. Ed. Delia Chiaro, Christine Heiss, and Chiara Bucaria. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2008. 79-99.
- _____. "Spoken Language in Film Dubbing: Target Language Norms, Interference and Translational Routines". *Between Text and Image: Updating Research in Screen Translation*. Ed. Delia Chiaro, Christine Heiss, and Chiara Bucaria. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008. 79-99.

- _____. “Dubbing English into Italian: A Closer Look at the Translation of Spoken Language.” *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*. Ed. Jorge Díaz-Cintas. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009. 197-209.
- _____. “The Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue: A Means to Several Ends”. *The Languages of Dubbing: Mainstream Audiovisual Translation in Italy*. Ed. Maria Pavesi, Maicol Formentelli, and Elisa Ghia. Bern: Peter Lang, 2014. 29-55.
- _____. “Translational Routines in Dubbing: Taking Stock and Moving Forwards”. *Linguistic and Cultural Representation in Audiovisual Translation*. Ed. Irene Ranzato, and Serenella Zanotti. London: Routledge, 2018a. 11-30.
- _____. “Reappraising Verbal Language in Audiovisual Translation: From Description to Application”. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation* 1.1 (2018b): 101-21.
- Pavesi, Maria, and Elisa Perego. “Profiling Film Translators in Italy: A Preliminary Analysis”. *JosTrans – The Journal of Specialised Translation* 6 (2006): 99-114.
- Pavesi, Maria, and Serenella Zanotti (forthcoming). “Translational Routines at the Crossroads of Corpus Studies and Historical Research: The Case of *yeah* > già in Dubbing”.
- Pulcini, Virginia. “Italian”. *English in Europe*. Ed. Manfred Görlach. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 151-67.
- Pulcini, Virginia, Cristiano Furiassi, and Félix Rodríguez González. “The Lexical Influence of English on European Languages: From Words to Phraseology”. *The Anglicization of European Lexis*. Ed. Cristiano Furiassi, Virginia Pulcini and Félix Rodríguez González. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012. 1-24.
- Raffaelli, Sergio. “Un italiano per tutte le stagioni.” *Barriere linguistiche e circolazione delle opere audiovisive: la questione doppiaggio*. A cura di Eleonora Di Fortunato e Mario Paolinelli. Roma: AIDAC, 1996. 25-28.
- Romero Fresco, Pablo. “Naturalness in the Spanish Dubbing Language: A Case of not-So-Close Friends” *Meta* 54.1 (2009): 49-72.
- Rossi, Fabio. *Il doppiaggio cinematografico*. Roma: Aracne, 2006.
- _____. “Doppiaggese, filmese e lingua italiana”, Retrieved from <http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/speciali/doppiaggio/Rossi.html> (last accessed April 2013). (2012).
- Sketch Engine*, <<http://www.sketchengine.eu>>
- Sileo, Angela. “Il doppiaggio: interferenze linguistiche sulla soglia tra inglese e italiano”. *Altre Modernità* 1 (2015): 56-69.
- _____. *Doppiaggese: verso la costruzione di un metodo*. Roma: UniversItalia, 2018.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Accademia della Crusca: *La Crusca è l'accademia italiana più longeva di sempre?* A cura di Matilde Poli, 21 ottobre 2016. 20 April 2020. <<https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/la-crusca-e-laccademia-italiana-piu-longeva-di-sempre-/1174>>

Treccani: *Lingua italiana. Domande e risposte*. 20 April 2022. <https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/domande_e_risposte/grammatica/grammatica_1553.html>

“Just the facts, ma’am”: Class, Masculinity and Family Representations in Jack Webb’s *Dragnet*

ANTONIO DI VILIO

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the origins of seriality in the history of American Television necessarily entails considering the rise of the first TV procedural crimes and in particular the role of Hollywood and figures such as Jack Webb, a prolific author who was able to create iconic shows, innovating and challenging the medium. *Dragnet* (1951-1959), in particular, was a revolution both in terms of technique and contents; its popular success was due not only to Webb’s experience as a radio program creator and actor in film noir but also to the collaboration of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and its controversial chief William H. Parker. *Dragnet*, which took its name from the police term “dragnet” – meaning a system of coordinated measures for apprehending criminals or suspects – soon became a real franchise, from the radio series, running on the NBC radio network from 1949 to 1957, to a considerable number of TV series seasons, films, parodies, soundtracks and books. Although the first season lasted 8 years (1951-1959), Webb relaunched the show in 1966, a revival that ran for another three seasons. Of course, the two editions of the series tend to differ significantly from an aesthetical point

of view – especially with the advent of colour – but also in terms of style and genre, mirroring the two different historical periods in which the show was aired. While the first series maintained a continuity with the radio series, using the same plots, scripts and often the same actors, the 60s series was more dramatic and ideologically centred. However, Jack Webb's *Dragnet* with his iconic Sgt. Joe Friday, challenged the conventional paradigm of the industry's early years of development, creating qualitative content and establishing tropes and conventions for many of the police dramas and procedural series of the following decades¹. Before delving into the ideology and the narrative of *Dragnet* – from which I pulled two particularly significant episodes – it is worth considering two crucial aspects, the socio-political context at the time the show was conceived and the cinematographic and cultural imagery to which it may refer.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Los Angeles implemented policies of social control that became the core of federal programs for the development of civic security and for the reconfiguration of urban space; the *developers*, so called by Mike Davis in his iconic essay *City of Quartz* (1990), and their financial allies, together with real-estate agents, oil magnates and entertainment moguls were the driving force behind the public-private coalition in order to satisfy Los Angeles's emergence as a "world city", but not without creating land speculation, social inequality and racial issues. At this point the urgency of a perfect city "with the best police force in the world" – as the scoop reporter Sid Hudgens quips at the beginning of *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis 1997) – was partially an institutional response to social issues; the positive image of the LAPD was conveyed not only through figures such as William H. Parker – police Chief from August 9, 1950 until his death in 1966 – but also through the media. In fact, Chief Parker was able to create a powerful mythic aura around the image of the cop and of LAPD, promoting it through a widespread advertising campaign, thanks to the Hollywood publicity machine and actual professional publicity but also through the supervision of television and media contents including the first season of *Dragnet*, when he was Jack Webb's advisor in 44 episodes of the TV Series. *Dragnet* was "conceived at a time when the institution was fast losing legitimacy with the urban poor and even sectors of the middle class" (Sharrett 165); Parker's vetting of the scripts of such a famous

¹ Not surprisingly, *Law & Order's* producer, Dick Wolf, claimed "Dragnet is the father of us all" (qtd. in Barton Palmer 33).

Television program was pure propaganda and widely increased its popularity and admiration in the entire nation. A process of erotization of the police was obtained through the representation of the LAPD macho ethos in movies that exalted "its icy and unnerving attitude toward the general citizenry" (Davis 42). This propaganda aimed at an erotization of power and supremacy as well as of a white masculinity, around which the police tried to configure its aesthetics. The series shows itself to be symptomatic not only of this aesthetics but also of the spread of American post-war ideology. In fact, the series' purpose was much more than a defence of the police, it wanted "to define 'American values' and to separate the righteous not just from criminals but from all the misfits, oddities, and malcontents who pollute the American landscape" (Sharrett 165). While the two editions of the series taken into account in this article heterogeneously show a right-wing conservative ideology, promoting – as I shall explain – family values and the domestic containment typical of Cold War narratives, what remains really constant is the representation of a work-oriented masculinity, irrespective of the surrounding environment and the succession of characters. This tendency can be explained by the clear influence of noir and classic police drama characterizations in the *Dragnet* franchise scripts, which are to be found in the creator Jack Webb's experience in noir works as well as in the cinematographic aesthetic of the 40s and early 50s, the golden age of film noir.

DRAGNET: FROM RADIO CRIME DRAMA TO POLICE SHOW

Prior to the *Dragnet* debut on NBC radio in 1949, Jack Webb was the star and radio actor of another detective program, *Pat Novak for Hire* (1946-1949), one of the post-war radio shows set in the San Francisco waterfront and heavily based on the classic hard-boiled protagonist, with fast and pulp dialogues and witty one-liners. Webb's career advanced significantly when in 1948 "a Hollywood casting director heard one of Webb's private-eye plays" (Buntin 389), and offered him a minor role in a new Eagle-Lion film, *He Walked by Night* (Welker 1948), widely recognized as one of the most important noir movies of the decade. This film was loosely based on the real murder of a California Highway patrolman and the script showed an impressive realism in the depiction of LAPD's investigation into the killer on the mean streets of Los Angeles. This realism was to establish the tone of both the *Dragnet* radio program and TV series but the influence

that *He Walked by Night* (1948) – directed by Alfred Louis Welker – had on *Dragnet*, proved to be crucial not only in terms of style and genre, but also for the relationship with the LAPD officers which Webb was able to build on the set. Most of the *Dragnet* radio and TV episodes are in fact inspired by the case files to which Webb had free access; this paved the way for the innovative and initially unpopular approach the show adopted from the very beginning. The realism and the documentary-style of his show were something new, which the audience was not used to; the spectator today may fail to consider the financial and artistic risk that *Dragnet* represented in 1949 with the first broadcasting of the radio show, and later in 1951, when the show format was converted into a TV show: “From the start, Webb was fanatical about getting the details right. Five soundmen were employed to create a range of more than three hundred special effects and wherever possible, the program used actual recordings from the department” (Buntin 294).

Webb’s show follows a fixed schema, in which a pattern is constructed in order to guarantee a realistic effect and confidential tone; the episodes always open with the same warning, a reappropriation of *He Walked by Night* (1948) opening: “Ladies and gentlemen, the story you’re about to see is true, the names have been changed to protect the innocents”. Similarly, the panorama shot of Los Angeles (the Civic Center, the blocks) at the beginning of every episode is very evocative of Welker’s movie opening. Each story is narrated in the first person by Joe Friday (played by Jack Webb) – the voiceover also seems to be an appropriation of *He Walked by Night* stylistic elements – and the internal focalization allows for a trustworthy narration of the case taken from the LAPD files. As Mittell says, “he is the most reliable of all possible first-person narrators, with no visible flaws, biases, or even emotions” (40). Repeating the same effect of the radio show, the audience has the impression that the narrator is basically reading an official police report in which all the actions have already taken place, thus leaving less room for alternative interpretations. Similarly, most of the episodes and dialogue scenes conclude with a moralistic phrase from detective Joe Friday – judging the past actions or making comments on the criminal acts – with “the two sweaty male fists that bang out the metal quasi- fascist Mark VII logo” (Sharrett 166), the symbol of Webb’s production company. Since it always plays a non-diegetic function, the iconic score also emphasizes the authoritative role and the words of Friday, stressing his courage and virtues, and it is used to mark the end of a scene by suggesting the progression of the investigation.

The semi-documentary style of *Dragnet* establishes the tone of the series from the beginning but it does not represent the only formal feature to which the show relates. This leads to another reflection concerning the difficulty of categorizing the TV series in a limited and precise genre. Some critics, such as Borde and Chaumeton, have objected that the American police-procedural documentary – with which *Dragnet* objectively shares some characteristics – is “in reality a documentary glorifying the police and there is nothing of this kind in *noir* films” (77). On the contrary, police officers in classic *noir* movies – e.g. John Huston’s *Asphalt Jungle* (1950) or Robert Montgomery’s *Lady in the Lake* (1947) – are often depicted as corrupt agents or even killers. In less extreme cases, private eyes or detectives with their individualism redress the deficiencies of the officers, as is the case of classic *noir* such as *Kiss me Deadly* (Aldrich 1955) or the vigilante figure of Brian Bendis’ *Daredevil* (2001-2006). On the other hand, *Dragnet* proves to be coherent with certain *noir* narratives, especially if we consider what J. Fred MacDonald calls the “Neo-realistic Detective phase”, in which the procedural aspect is stressed alongside a return to a realism and cynicism towards society. MacDonald suggests that this trend of the late 1940s parallels film *noir* through its presentation of crime as symptomatic of a larger societal malaise in the figure of the disillusioned and reluctant detective (Mittell 128).

It becomes clear that despite *Dragnet*’s incompatibility with a unique and definitive genre, it borrows elements from both classic film *noir* and semi-documentary *noir*, showing an awareness of the genre both in terms of contents and style. Considering the semi-documentary cycle to be rooted in films such as *The House on 92nd Street* (Hathaway 1945) or *The Naked City* (Dassin 1942), one can observe how *Dragnet* maintains not only the same interest in the institutional forces of law (and its rhetoric) but also the rejection of the “psychic/sexual destabilization and emotional angst which are integral to many of the ‘tough’ thrillers” (Krutnik 204), i.e. the classic hard-boiled form of *noir* that dominated the 40s *noir* scene. This latter point, as I will show, is crucial to my analysis of *Dragnet* with regard to the representation of masculinity, family and, more generally, the encoded meanings and ideology behind the narrative.

Moreover, I regard the style and directing techniques to be in line with the tone and intentions of Webb’s work. Minimal camera movements, a clean scene and quasi-invisible editing help to emphasize the naturalism, so that “the primary effect of the show’s style is again to highlight procedures over

characters, facts over emotions, and rigid order over chaotic crime” (Mittell 145). To this end, the standard *Dragnet* sequence consists exclusively of close-up, reiterated long shots, reneging on the classic Hollywood medium shot, thus adapting the former radio episodes to 30 minutes of quite fast visual narrative. Also in this case, different visual styles are eventually used in the same 30 minutes episode; while the program’s intention is to create a realist narrative, its style moves away from the zero-degree narration typical of cinema realism. The show in fact also references hard-boiled detective dramas, with similar first-person narration and cynical portrayals of social problems, “but through its mixture with semi-documentary authenticity, these assumptions often linked to film noir lose their association with noir’s moral ambiguity, becoming firmly ensconced within clear distinctions between right and wrong” (Mittell 139). Boosting the realism effect, *Dragnet’s* narrative leads to a constant binarity, fostering evaluation and a kind of educational tone, especially when the rhetoric of law enforcement and the Los Angeles myth of security are employed.

Starting from this premise – considering Webb’s cultural background, the variety of noir influences and institutional support behind the show – it is easier to activate discourses on the interpretation, ideology and representations of the society depicted in *Dragnet*, with particular attention to the domestic imagery created in post-war America and to the work-oriented and self-sufficient masculinity typical of noir narratives.

“THE BIG FAMILY” (1955): DOMESTIC CONTAINMENT AND COLD WAR NARRATIVES

Post-War America was characterized by a general trend towards conformity and domestic containment, in which men and women had precise roles in society, specific models to follow. The common message of postwar film and television, therefore, was “that America was the happiest place on Earth for those who adhered to strict limitations on what constituted happiness and were also able to believe that institutional injustice, authoritarian clergy, dogmatic teachers, and sadistic police were rare to nonexistent” (Nadel 8).

Lynn Spigel, in her essay *Make Room for TV* (1992), has analysed the way in which television in the 1950s intervened in shaping gender roles in American society and the way it drew on those roles to establish its round-the-clock

presence in the American household. As the postwar suburban home became a site of female labour, television adapted its programming to accommodate women's daytime domestic routines: "By the 1950s, televisions were selling at a rate of over 5 million a year. Television also fostered the classless ideal. Commercials extended the reach of advertising into people's homes, as did the abundant lifestyles portrayed on the screen" (May 163). As stated by the feminist writer Betty Friedan, in post-war American families "polio and smallpox were replaced by depression and alcoholism", and the American way of life reflected the image of pop-cultural products:

Consider the terms of women's new empowerment, the startling changes since that time I wrote about, only three decades ago, when women were defined only in sexual relation to men – man's wife, sex object, mother, housewife – and never as persons defining themselves by their own actions in society. That image, which I called "the feminine mystique," was so pervasive, coming at us from the women's magazines, the movies, the television commercials. (Friedan 15)

According to Friedan, the roots of the problem lay in a society that imposed a specific model for women to follow and that publicized education and professional achievement for women as undesirable, while at the same time celebrating women's "natural" role as nurturers and companions. A woman's guiding principle was that of the nurturer: she was wife, mother, and homemaker. Her self-fulfilment came from childbearing and altruism.

On the other hand, men were the breadwinners, programmed to work out of the home and concentrate on their own success. If, on the one hand, "women were described as irrational, emotional, gentle, obedient, cheerful, dependent, men were, conversely, represented as rational, individualistic, unemotional, solid, and aggressive" (Carosso 72). In *Modern Women: The Lost Sex*, Farnham and Lundberg argued that modern women were unhappy and uncertain precisely because they had neglected their womanly roles, i.e., their natural state.

Not surprisingly, what today we define as Cold War narratives have fundamental elements such as "fears of a masculine decline and the spectres of female alienation" (Carosso 128); the common message of Post-War America – albeit heavily influenced by noir aesthetics with black and white episodes – is conveyed in a relevant way also in the original edition of Jack Webb's *Dragnet*, which aired from 1951 to 1958 (8 seasons). The seasons took a documentary approach, narrating real LAPD cases through the lens of Joe Friday (Jack

Webb) and his partner Officer Frank Smith (Ben Alexander); every episode has the same formula as well as the title (The Big...), clearly following the hard-boiled names tradition by echoing Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939).

The episode I analyze here – “The Big Family” (1955) – proves to be symptomatic not only of the dynamics of the 50s American society, but also serves as an example of the development of the genre into a television format, providing a pioneering role for the police procedural.

The episode starts with the story of an executive who leaves a suicide note in his car together with a pistol, two spent bullets and no trace of the body. Friday and Smith working Homicide and Missing Persons Detail, in an attempt to find the man, interrogate his family. It is precisely through the portrait of his family that the two police investigators will manage to find the man and understand the reason for his disappearance. As the narrative follows police procedure – Friday and Smith's working so hard under the rain that they can barely grab a coffee – it becomes clear that Mr. Jarrett didn't committed suicide and that the real focus of the investigation is shifting from the reason for his disappearance to the meaning of it.

However, right from the beginning of Friday's voiceover, the ideology of the narrative highlights Mr. Jarrett positive virtues, such as his being a “prominent, prosperous, great investor” while his wife, Mrs. Jarrett, is merely depicted as an “attractive woman”. Similarly, the attributes of their son Keith and daughter Evelyn are textually vehiculated in opposition to their father's qualities as a successful business man, devoted to his family's inherited “one million dollar concern” and, above all, a self-sufficient middle-aged man. When the two officers interrogate Mrs. Jarrett in her apartment, Friday emphasizes the “strong smell of liquor on her breath” and, indeed, the whole meeting is based on Mrs. Jarrett addiction to alcohol, demonstrated not only by her words and gestures but by the officers' look of disapproval:

Sgt. Friday: You know of any business troubles that might have upset him?

Mrs. Jarrett: No, Jack never discussed business with me. He had his own interests, children have their own interests, I guess I have mine. I drink, Sergeant, it's something to do, I drink every day in the week, I drink quite a bit since the children left, I don't blame them. Jack didn't care, I guess I don't care of myself anymore, we never were a family... Can't you go away and leave me alone? Can't you see that all I want is a little happiness. I don't care what I have to pay, just a little happiness.

Sgt. Friday: You won’t buy with it.

Mrs. Jarrett: Maybe. It doesn’t seem to matter too much to me.

Low-angle and documentary-style camera shots portraying Mrs. Jarrett’s binge drinking, with a full bottle of alcohol on the table, actually suggests, in the economy of the scene, the officers’ view of the “ma’am”² merely as an alcoholic and depressed solitary woman in her house, struggling for a “little happiness”. As she claims that since her children left she began to drink, Mrs. Jarrett’s identity emerges as fitting Friedan’s analysis of the “feminine mystique”, inasmuch as her fulfillment was strictly related to her role of “nurturer and child bearer” (Friedan 69).

When the son Keith, a young tennis player, is asked by Friday about a good reason why his father wanted to take his own life, he answers: “Have you met my mother?”, implicitly blaming her for the collapse of the family. The narration of the procedure – with the well-built crescendo typical of the classic detective story – leads to what amounts to a final act of redemption for Mr. Jarrett as regards his suicide gesture. In fact, he is found in Oregon where he is enjoying his freedom “doing some fishing, learning to cook and travelling”; the man’s final explanation for his disappearance is exactly the same as the viewer is led to expect throughout the episode, namely that Mr. Jarrett escaped from a disappointing and dysfunctional family that does not reflect his values.

Mr. Jarrett: Have you met my wife? My son? My daughter? And you know, my wife’s been an alcoholic for eight years...why be polite...she’s a drunk. My son is a tennis bum, there’s no other word for that. My daughter, you know as well as I do, two divorces, different boyfriend every week. I worked hard for my family, sergeant, I was proud of that once, but what would you do if they turned out the way they have?... I got tired of it, maybe I’m just getting old. [...] Well, there’s nothing more to tell, officers, I worked most of my life for my family, two vacations in 20 years, I tried to do everything I could for them. They are rotting apart, sergeant, all three of them, I didn’t want to stand around and watch them rotten, that’s why I left [...] It gets lonely sometimes.

² There is a repeated back-and-forth of the honorifics, namely Sgt vs Ma’am, emphasizing the roles and the authority in the scene. I suggest here the reading of Natalie Angier’s interesting article (appeared in *The New York Times* about the term “ma’am” and its cultural values also from a social and feminist prospective.

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/weekinreview/29angier.html>>

Sgt. Friday: What are you going to do now?

Mr. Jarrett: I don't know yet. Maybe I drive up the highway, take a look at Alaska, great country up there, doing some fishing...great country we live in, officers... [...] Would you like to stay for dinner? I'm learning to cook.

What the viewer discovers at the end of the episode, after Mr. Jarrett's monologue, is that the solution of the mystery lies exactly in Mr. Jarrett's reasons for "getting lost", those of a man who has worked hard all his life and whose family has betrayed his values. He is disappointed in his wife for her addiction and unhappy life; he calls his son "a tennis bum" – tennis here is depicted as the symbol of middle-upper class idleness – because of his refusal to follow in his father's footsteps and he is ashamed of his daughter Evelyn "twice married, twice divorced", showing a generation gap current in the 50s and 60s American families (and that I will make more explicit in the analysis of the 60s episode in the next paragraph). Both the female figures of this episode, Mrs. Jarrett and Evelyn, are represented as frivolous, the former intent on admiring the carnations, the latter petting and combing her ponytail-wearing dog. However, the critical point of the episode is in fact not so much in the representation of the family itself but in its being a symptom of the personality of the *pater familias*; the investigations of Friday and Smith are in this case a way to endorse, if not to justify, his disappearance with no interest in carrying on an exhaustive narration of his wife and "grown children" reasons. Moreover, what emerges from the final confrontation between the man and the two officers is a kind of comradely sympathy for Mr. Jarrett's situation; the officers' understanding attitude during Mr. Jarrett's monologue emphasizes not only the legal innocence of the man – with Sgt. Friday's final assertion "it is no crime to get lost" – but also the moral one.

This brings me to another reflection about the representation of the man and his general virtues that emerges from the *Dragnet* narrative; while Mrs. Jarrett fits into Friedan's depiction of a homemaker, companion and depressed wife, Mr. Jarrett and Sgt. Joe Friday show themselves as sharing similar ethics to the ones on which the ideology of "The Big Family" (1955) episode is built. Despite the fact that during the 50s American society promoted values such as family togetherness, both the male protagonists of this episode share a work-oriented masculinity that characterizes their agency. In *Dragnet*, there is in

fact a recurrent depiction of the male as a self-sufficient human being, an authoritative, heavy-smoking breadwinner.³

Joe Friday, unlike his police partners, is not married and he rarely dates women; the way he demonstrates his masculinity is only through his comments about the investigations and his emotional distance. All Friday’s agency and role in the narrative is related to his work and his personality mirrors that of the ideal police officer. Embodying what Kathleen Gerson (1993) calls “autonomous masculinity”, Friday shows no interest in parenting and domesticity (“involved masculinity”), nor is his work a means of providing for his family (“breadwinning masculinity”). Although this may seem odd since in 50s America an unmarried man was considered unhappy or homosexual (Mintz 180), Friday’s convinced bachelorhood may derive from his belonging to an older literary tradition of the lone man, secure in his masculinity but without family ties, a characterization typical of the private-eye/hardboiled detective. In his case – as many male officers in the police force show – women, emotional involvement or marriage could be synonyms of distraction from his work and moral integrity as an officer. As the scholar Julie D’Acci (1994) suggests, the separation from women of cop heroes makes them worthier stand-ins for the law, as they epitomize a more pure, independent form of masculinity.

“THE BIG DEPARTURE” (1968): TV AND IDEOLOGY IN LATE 60S LOS ANGELES

“I don’t know, Joe. When we were growing up, we saw things as black and white, right and wrong. Kids today just seem to look at everything as various shades of gray.”

— Bill Gannon, *Dragnet*, 1969

When the second edition of *Dragnet* was aired in 1967, after an eight-year break, Jack Webb showed an obvious attempt to face the changes and the issues of Los Angeles 60s society. The tube was now saturated with colours

³ Jack Webb was also the face of the advertising campaigns of many cigarette companies (Fatima, Chesterfield) and the tobacco conglomerate Liggett & Myers sponsored the radio show and then the TV version. Cigarettes in the show are undoubtedly emblematic of Friday’s hardboiled urban masculinity and Webb appeared in poster ads, “and eventually in TV ads, momentarily coming out of character to address the audience directly” (Sabin 17).

and the counterculture was clearly operating in “various shades of gray” rather than in Dragnet’s black-and-white world.

While the imprinting and the ideological approach of the series remained the same, the themes and the questions addressed in the 98 episodes (January 12, 1967, to April 16, 1970) were symptomatic of LAPD anxieties about L.A. countercultural values, the spread of drug use⁴ and the hippie culture. The peacekeeping and security measures adopted by the police were heavily questioned, especially after the handling of the 1965 Watts Riots, several corruption scandals and the defense of COINTELPRO, the (domestic) spy program started by FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover in the 1950s. In the counterculture movement of the 1960s, Webb found quite a bit of material that inspired many of the program’s antagonists for several episodes (such as “The LSD Story” or “The Big Prophet”); hippies, protestors, pot smokers, black militants, liberal intellectuals, and a gaggle of miscellaneous “social misfits” are now the core of the investigations. “Joe Friday in the 1960s also confronts thieves, killers, and bunko artists, but these villains are not nearly as compelling, nor as savagely caricatured, as the symbols of social upheaval that Webb so ardently despises” (Sharrett 167).

What had been the ideological assumptions behind the show’s first season, were now basically reinforced in the name of Cold War government rhetoric and conservative ideals; on the other hand, “whereas viewers may have accepted the show’s police-centred moral clarity in the 1950s, the changing role of the police as participants in social disorder had pushed the credibility limits of Dragnet’s authenticated voice of authority” (Mittell 149).

What emerges from the new episodes of *Dragnet 1967* – as the episode “The LSD Story” clearly shows – is not only a television representation of the War on Drugs motives which prompted the 1970 Control Act but also of an important generational debate between those who believed in America and its institutions as the happiest place on Earth and those who did not. Besides, as Alan Nadel claims in his *Demographic Angst*:

If the premise that America suffered from malaise, ennui, joylessness, and passivity was correct, then perhaps the simplest explanation for the cultural revolution of

⁴ In the 1967 episode “The LSD Story”, the young dooper Blue Boy during one of his drug trips mumbles, “Brown, blue, yellow, green, lavender, pink, orange, red, red-red and red... I can hear them. I can hear them all”, reflecting the importance of colors related to the hippie and drug culture vs. the black-and-white cops’ world.

the late 1960s is that the generation that grew up during this limp and tepid era thought it was about time to enjoy prosperity. The formative years of the baby boomers manifest great disparity between the ebullient exceptionalism of the Cold War propaganda factory and the alleged joylessness of its producers and consumers. (8)

Yet, this generational debate derives from the activation of a certain polarisation of values that spread through the U.S. during the 50s and 60s Post War period and it also provides the basis for the storyline of many *Dragnet* episodes, including "The Big Departure" (1968), aired on March 7, where the L.A. social turmoil which the police attempted to contain is presented in the episode as a naïve juvenile crime or whim.

"The Big Departure" narrates a case in which Joe Friday and his partner Bill Gannon are grappling with a few teenagers who want to start their own form of social organization on an island off the coast of California. For this purpose, they start to steal food and equipment from local stores when they are caught by the police. Much of the episode's narrative deals not so much with the process of investigation as with the long interrogation that unfolds in a LAPD interview room; this conversation-as-plot episode shows a confrontation between the two officers and the juveniles, Charles L. Vail⁵, Dennis J. Meldon and Paul Seaver.

Jack Webb's voiceover narration relates that since the individual interviews have been a failure, they started a group interview, a move that clearly shows how from the police point of view the identity and dignity of the juveniles are more linked to a gang affiliation rather than to their individuality. In fact, the narrative sets the tone for a binary representation, the juveniles with their new hippie values vs the conservative policemen. Since it is easy to guess the predominant side in the ideological and political transmission of meanings, what is interesting is the way in which the representation of the hippie values is actually a downsizing operation of the phenomenon which is repressed by Sgt. Joe Friday's voice of authority in the name of his idea of society and justice. Friday and Gannon then remind the boys that there's no way their utopian dream of building another kind of society (non-materialistic, non-patriarchal, non-capitalistic) will work, and that "they don't know anything about the real world".

⁵ Charles is also called by Gannon "Charlie" and the juveniles' look is somewhat evocative of Charles Manson and his family.

Friday and Gannon proceed to scold the young men for not appreciating all that the United States can offer them, and how great their country is compared to everywhere else:

Sgt. Friday: The fact is, more people are living better right here than anyone else ever before in history. So don't expect us to roll over and play dead when you say you're dissatisfied. It's not perfect, but it's a great deal better than when we grew up.

Boosting a binary representation of youthful angst against the establishment or the rhetoric of the countercultural villains vs. the good policemen, the narrative choices aim to weaken the hippies' monologues and invigorate Webb and Gannon's speech.

Dennis, while trying to defend his countercultural idea of life, claims that his family "has no values" and that he and his friends want to dedicate themselves to "the attainment of freedom expression without no qualification for the human spirit into total renunciation of material values":

Dennis: We've organized a new society, with a new order of things... getting rid of materialistic values.

Sgt. Friday: Where do you plan to set up this utopia?

Dennis: We got a place.

Sgt. Friday: Where?

Dennis: I Can't tell you that...that's a perfect form of government.

Sgt. Friday: Nobody's ever made it work.

Utopia is the word Joe chooses to call the hippies' would-be society, a term that has always been related not only to the countercultural movement but above all to the communist regime. In fact, this dialogue is not just related to a generational debate but also to Webb's clear anxiety to divert them from their utopia. What Webb is defending is not only the idea of American government and its conservative ideals but above all a received idea of family and justice.

When one thinks of *Dragnet* one must take into consideration the general public it was addressed to; the show aired every Thursday at 9:30–10:00 pm (EST) and it was supposed to be seen after family dinners on a three channels

television⁶. *Dragnet*'s educational purpose was clear as “the television turned out to be a medium that did not so much represent America...as it rather ended up projecting a new vision of normality to which the nation could aspire” (Carosso 2012, 83).

“The Big Departure” in fact appears to be not so much an invitation not to join any cult, as a representation of a nation – 60s America – in which forms of organization and systems of values other than capitalistic ones were to be condemned. *Dragnet* contributed to the operation of normality projected on the screen, the projection of American family life and of a “new people’s capitalism”. Therefore, the show was part of “only those kinds of shows which could be considered beneficial to family life, law and order, and ‘the American way’” (Sabin 16).

At the same time, Jack Webb embodies a precise idea of justice, deeply rooted in the LAPD and in the government rhetoric typical of the Cold War years. If, as Donatella Izzo claims, “la funzione retorica complessiva del poliziesco, sovraordinata alle diverse strategie dei singoli testi o dei singoli sottogeneri, è dunque quella di riconciliare il cittadino allo stato in nome di una fantasia di giustizia” (Izzo 4), what then is the fantasy of justice that can be found in *Dragnet*?

In “The Big Family” (1955) the binary representation of justice in the final resolution of events implies that the *pater familias* was “right” to leave his family who had betrayed his ideals as a middle class family man and, as a result, they “deserved” to suffer the consequences.

In “The Big Departure” (1968) the hippie protestors in the end are returned to their respective families after having left them to found their own community; Friday and Gannon’s final monologue not only reflects a generational and political debate that is on the side of the cops but that is also an invitation to morally commit to a specific idea of family; the officers encapsulate here what Mark Fisher defined the simultaneous and synchronized emergence of capitalist realism and domestic realism, and their co-implication: “the idea that there’s no alternative to capitalism and there’s no alternative to the family either” (102). In other words, the reiteration of Cold War rhetoric

⁶ The three original networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—had in fact a kind of oligopoly in the American television industry up to the 1980s, though Home Box Office (HBO) began offering its subscribers recently released movies, uncut and commercial-free, months or years before the broadcasting stations would air those same films edited for time and content restraints and interrupted by advertisements.

in *Dragnet* assumes a dual significance; one political and legal – intimately connected with the Red Scare⁷ – and one that I would define as ethical. In both the episodes the infringement of the law is always minor as compared to the ethical shortcomings. The emphasis placed on the ingrained, conservative moral and cultural values of 50s-60s American society, make it easy for the viewer to embrace a specific idea of justice, that coincides perfectly with Jack Webb's one. In fact, since it is true that during the 60s the LAPD was losing control of the populace due to current events, then Jack Webb was the very figure to reinstate the police image, and not so much through teamwork as thanks to his personal ability and sensibility.⁸

This brings me to another reflection about the absence of police violence in *Dragnet 1967* – what Mike Davis describes as “a vengeful reign of terror by the LAPD” (211) – in the representation of the Civil Rights Movement and law enforcement. In “The Big Departure”, the moment of the encounter between the “good force” and the “evil force” is barely represented; on the contrary what is boosted is precisely the police's ability to handle the situation a posteriori, precisely in the LAPD interview room, where Friday and Gannon feel much more confident than the criminals. As Mittel claims:

Webb kept gunplay and violence to a minimum on the show, while he claimed that this was part of his quest for authenticity, as violence was over-represented on crime dramas versus real police work, one effect of downplaying portrayals of violence and crime on *Dragnet* is to minimize moments in the text in which the social order upheld by the police is threatened, questioned, or undermined. (142)

An overall view of *Dragnet 1967* would confirm, in my opinion, that this second edition of the show seems to be much more a defence of the police than an attempt to promote its image. As the Sixties political climate was becoming increasingly hostile, several episodes showed the police's attempt to demonstrate its benign intentions, like in the 1969 episode “Intelligence

⁷ Jack Webb was also the narrator in the anti-communist propaganda short film *Red Nightmare* (1962) directed by George Waggner, recently featured in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice* (2014).

⁸ Not surprisingly, Mittel points out that in the US in the 1970s, a new form of the police procedural emerged and became dominant, one that focused more on the abilities of unique, charismatic police officers rather than the inevitable success of law enforcement as an entire system.

DR-34” (1969) in which Webb claims “I wear a badge, Paul – not a swastika”. This retort occurs, in fact, after Paul Reed (Peter Duryea), complains about the Department spurning “help” from the likes of the Fielder Militia, a paramilitary organization (Duryea) Reed is actually considering joining, in order to handle Civil Rights protestors:

Sgt. Friday: “Patriotism? That militia of yours has got a corner on the market! Civil rights? They got ’em all! Protesters? Shoot ’em all down! That may be your philosophy, Paul, but it’s not mine, and I don’t think it’s the Department’s either. We work it a little different in this country.”

Duryea: “What do you mean?”

Sgt. Friday: “I wear a badge, Paul – not a swastika.”

“I carry a badge” is also a standard claim of Joe Friday’s opening monologue in the 60s edition of *Dragnet*. This monologue met with protest from the LAPD, who objected to the term “cop.” After the first few seasons of *Dragnet*, the LAPD convinced Webb to change the phrase to “I work here – I carry a badge” (Domanick 125), also echoing the former alternative title of the show “Badge 714”. The badge is in fact not only the symbol of the *Dragnet* franchise but it also comes across as the emblem of Friday’s responsibility ethics – something to “carry” – as well as of the iconic representation of his authority.

Although Friday’s partner, Gannon, is also wearing the same badge, his agency in the narration is less related to a sense of responsibility. Gannon’s role as sidekick in the series is also much less serious than that of former partner Sgt Smith’s character in the first edition of the show. He is (also) entrusted with a comic side in that he is a happy family man who likes eating and complaining about his aches and pains while Friday simply drinks coffee and smokes cigarettes; as a result, Friday’s masculinity in *Dragnet 1967* seems more pronounced by his coming across as a “confirmed bachelor, as superior to feminized family man Bill Gannon” (Sharrett 168). Moreover, the comic side of Gannon’s character is emphasized in the film version of *Dragnet* (Mankiewicz 1987), in which Tom Hanks plays what is almost a parody of Friday’s sidekick. Regardless of stylistic choices, the film’s weak narrative and lack of popularity reflect the importance of the serialization of *Dragnet*, not only because of the popular appeal of the medium (radio, TV) but because of its reassuring message. Now that the LAPD were able to enter not only the

public sphere (in the streets) but also the private sphere of people's homes (through the TV), citizens could believe they were living in the safest city and "with the best police force in the world" thanks to whom society could "protect the innocent".

In other words, *Dragnet* also played an important redemptive role, whereby people could accept – or justify – police work in the L.A. area whether it was bad or good, mainly thanks to Webb's figure and his unquestionable work ethic and affable approach. Not surprisingly, the show was recognized by the media at a time when the police force was pushing its PR and when Webb died in 1982 he was given a funeral with full police honours (Sabin 20). As Mittel claims, "*Dragnet's* ideology is not an idealized vision of society as presented in idyllic sitcoms, but the authenticated and unswerving belief in the system to continually discipline offenders and protect the innocent" (139).

Despite its fiery conservative rhetoric, Webb's *Dragnet* was able to offer a singular and groundbreaking narrative, both in terms of style and medium, portraying the Cold War era in a coherent and varied light, and ultimately establishing an enduring rapport between the institution/author and the society/spectator. Yet, behind "just the facts" what remains is the problem of interpreting the facts, with the awareness that facts can be stranger than fiction and that no noir narrative is ever entirely free from political or ideological implications.

WORKS CITED

- “Intelligence: DR-34”. *Dragnet 1969*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1969. Television.
- “The Big Departure”. *Dragnet 1968*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1968. Television.
- “The Big Family”. *Dragnet*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1955. Television.
- “The LSD Story”. *Dragnet 1967*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1967. Television.
- Barton Palmer, R. “Dragnet, Film Noir, and Postwar Realism”. *The Philosophy of TV Noir*. Ed. Steven M. Sanders and Aeon J. Skoble. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008.
- Bendis, Brian. *Daredevil*. New York: Marvel, 2001-2006.
- Borde, Raymond, and Étienne Chaumeton. “Towards a Definition of Film Noir”. *Film Noir Reader*, Ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 1996.
- Buntin, John. *L.A. Noir*. New York: Harmony Books, 2009.
- Carosso, Andrea. *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950s*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
- D’Acci, Julie. *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.
- _____. *Set The Night On Fire. L.A. in the Sixties*. London: Verso. 2020.
- Domanick, Joe. *To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD’s Century of War in the City of Dreams*. Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2003.
- Dragnet* (Badge 714). Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1951-1959. Television.
- Dragnet*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC, 1967-1970. Television.
- Dragnet*. Created by Jack Webb. NBC. 1949-1957. Television.
- Dragnet*. Dir. Tom Mankiewicz. Universal Pictures, 1987.
- Fisher, Mark. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. London: Repeater Books, 2020.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.
- Gerson, Kathleen. *No Man’s Land: Men’s Changing Commitments to Family and Work*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

- Greven, David. *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema. The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- He Walked by Night*. Dir. Alfred L. Werker. USA, Bryan Foy Productions, 1948.
- Izzo, Donatella. "The best of all possible worlds? Rhetorics and Politics in TV Police Procedurals in the USA". *Between* 4. 7 (2014): 1-19.
- Kiss me, Deadly*. Dir. Robert Aldrich. United Artists, 1955.
- Krutnik, Frank. *In a Lonely Street. Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- L.A. Confidential*. Dir. Curtis Hanson. Warner Bros, 1997.
- Lamb, Alexandra. *Policing the Bromance: Platonic Male Relationship in Cop Shows*. Middletown: Wesleyan University, April 2013.
- Lundberg, Ferdinand, and Marynia F. Farnham. *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947.
- MacDonald, J. Fred. *Don't Touch That Dial!: Radio Programming in American Life from 1920 to 1960*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homebound. American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
- Mintz, Steven, and Susan Kellogg. *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1988.
- Mittell, Jason. *Genre and Television: from Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Nadel, Alan. *Demographic Angst: Cultural Narratives and American Films of the 1950s*. Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2017.
- Pat Novak, For Hire*. Created by Jack Webb. ABC, 1946-49. Radio.
- Red Nightmare*. Dir. George Waggoner. Warner Bros., 1962.
- Sabin, Roger *et al.* *Cop Shows: A Critical History of Police Dramas on Television*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015.
- Sharrett, Christopher. "Jack Webb and the Vagaries of Right-Wing TV Entertainment". *Cinema Journal* 51.4 (2012): 165-71.
- Spigel Lynn, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- The Asphalt Jungle*. Dir. John Huston. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950.
- The House on 92nd Street*. Dir. Henry Hathaway. 20th Century Fox, 1945.

The Lady in the Lake. Dir. Robert Montgomery. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. 1947.

The Naked City. Dir. Jules Dassin. Hellinger Productions, 1948.

“You don’t know nothing about being me”: Ideology and Characterisation in *When They See Us*

PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last 15-20 years, a growing number of academic disciplines have delved into the world of TV series, from a large variety of perspectives: Montemurro, for example, has investigated the realities these cultural products construct from a sociological point of view, focusing on the consequences on people’s behaviour and ways of making sense of the world; Orosz *et al.*, on the other hand, have analysed the psychological correlates of screen-based behaviour in order to explain the obsessive and/or positive reactions associated with series watching; narratologists like Pfister have outlined the different communicative functions of language in dramatic situations, while stylistically-inclined critics like Toolan have looked at selective, recurrent features in the style of TV shows, comparing them to more traditional narratives. As far as more linguistic-oriented perspectives are concerned, researchers have mainly studied the functions of particular phenomena like multilingualism (Bleichenbacher), accent or dialect (Bruti and Vignozzi; Minutella; Lippi-Green), movie conversation (Pavesi; Forchini, *American*), linguistic variation (Queen), dialogue (Kozloff), accessibility (Bernabé and Orero; Perego). A considerable

amount of work has been carried out, in particular, by Bednarek, who has used corpus techniques for the investigation of crucial aspects like ideology (*Fictional*), characterisation (“Nerdiness”, “Big Bang Theory”), dialogue (*Language*), and the multifunctionality of taboo words (“Multifunctionality”, “Don’t Say Crap”), to mention but a few.

By combining Critical Discourse Approaches and Corpus-Stylistics ones, the present contribution aims at joining the current, ongoing discussion on the proliferation of TV series starting from the assumption that one of today’s most urgent needs in academic education is the promotion of ‘televsual literacy’, i.e. the capacity to identify potential ideologies and/or cultural stereotypes that may manipulate viewers in a way that is contrary to their own beliefs. With this in mind, the primary aim of this paper is to analyse how various types of semiotic modes can be used to construe such crucial phenomena as ideology and characterisation. In doing so, notions from multimodality (Baldry and Thibault; O’Halloran, Tan and Marissa, “Critical”; O’Halloran *et al.*, “Multimodal”), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough; Van Dijk, *Power*, “Ideology”), stylistics (Jeffries and McIntyre; Trevisan, “Mind”, *Characterisation*) and corpus linguistics (McIntyre and Walker; McEneary; Bednarek, *Television*) will be jointly combined to attempt an initial collection of analytical tools aimed at the development of critical awareness in students and, more generally, in TV viewers as a whole.

The remaining part of the paper is organised as follows: section 2 will be devoted to the introduction and description of the case-study; section 3 will investigate the role of the paratext and of the very first moments of the narrative for the construction of viewers’ expectations; section 4 will be concerned with the ideological patterns that permeate the whole *When They See Us* show; section 5 will deal with characterisation strategies; section 6 will introduce some concluding remarks and ideas for future studies.

2. FROM “THE CENTRAL PARK JOGGER CASE” TO *WHEN THEY SEE US*

The case-study chosen for this paper is the American TV Show *When They See Us* (WTSU henceforth), a miniseries created for Netflix by the American filmmaker Ava DuVernay, which was premiered on May 31st, 2019.

The four episodes of the show narrate the events of a criminal case known as the ‘Central Park Jogger Case’, which took place in New York in 1989 and

brought to the wrongful conviction of five Black and Latino male teenagers: Kevin Richardson, Antron McCray, Raymond Santana, Yusef Salaam and Korey Wise. The whole story spans a quarter of a century, with each episode exploring a different moment in the protagonists’ experience: in the first one, a white woman is assaulted and raped in Central Park and the show’s protagonists are taken to the police station and interrogated for the simple reason that they had been spending time in the park on that same night. During this episode, it soon becomes clear that the police intend to invent a narrative aimed at accusing and convicting the teenagers, despite a clear lack of evidence: the characters are subsequently pressured into confessing to a crime they have not committed and are set up against each other. The second episode portrays their life in prison and their experience with the court hearings: all the characters are charged with rape and assault despite the evidence brought by their lawyers to show their innocence. The third episode shows the difficulties four of them experience in reconnecting with life once they are released from prison: in particular, it explores issues in socialisation and work reintegration, mainly due to the social stigma attached to the fact that they were considered ex-convicts. The fourth episode is entirely dedicated to the portrayal of a single character: Korey Wise. His personal growth in jail is explored by means of continuous flashbacks and flashforwards, until his final release.

The show received great critical acclaim, with an approval rate of 96% on Rotten Tomatoes. It received 11 Emmy Awards nominations, including the one for Outstanding Limited Series: the actor Jharrel Jerome, interpreting Korey Wise, won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series. In particular, WTSU was praised for the way in which it came to symbolise the racial injustices black and brown people may experience within the American legal system and in media coverage. As the real Yusef Salaam recently remarked:

I knew how big this series would be. And I knew how small our story had become. I say that because when we were found innocent, there was no tsunami of media that followed in the way that tsunami came out within the first few weeks when they thought we were guilty. The criminal justice system says that you’re innocent until proven guilty. *But if you’re black or brown, you are guilty and have to prove yourself innocent. And I think that is the difference, that two Americas that is often talked about. There are so many components that let you down* (Yousef Salam, my emphasis).

Interestingly, the series also features the then future American President Donald Trump's reaction to 'The Central Park's Jogger Case'. In episode 2, his actual words during a TV broadcast are reported: "I would like to be a well-educated black today, because I really believe they do have an actual advantage today". In that same year, Trump spent \$85000 for a full-page advertisement published in New York's four most important newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Daily News*, *The New York Post* and *New York Newsday*). The text in the headline, written in upper-case, read "BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY. BRING BACK OUR POLICE", while in the body-copy the following words were used: "I want to hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and when they kill, they should be executed for their crimes". In the light of what would happen during the 2017-2021 Presidential Mandate, this type of racist language was clearly anticipating the rhetorical argumentation he would reiterate when talking about immigrants.

It is significant that just one year before the show was aired, the police violence against the Black community was condemned in a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in which it was explicitly stated that racial disparities "permeate the criminal justice system, are widespread and represent a clear threat to the human rights of African Americans, including the rights to life, personal integrity, non-discrimination, and due process, among others" (Inter-American Commission Report).

3. THE ROLE OF PARATEXT: HOW TO BEGIN TO CONSTRUCT A FICTIONAL WORLD

As remarked by Genette and Maclean, a 'journey' across a fictional world starts from its paratextual elements: titles, images, font types, cover lay-outs, etc. all contribute to the creation of a 'border area' where new 'laws' between readers and texts are stipulated, and expectations primed. In telecinematic discourse, paratextual elements are mainly embedded in the preview image, as exemplified in *Fig.1*.

The first paratextual elements viewers encounter in WTSU are a combination of verbal text on the left hand-side and an image portraying the five main characters on the right hand-side. The verbal text is a graphologically foregrounded hypotactic clause used without a correspondent main clause: in other words, the very first linguistic element of the show is a sentence left



FIG 1: WTSU's preview image

unfinished, which is likely to open-up some room for interpretation in the viewers' minds. *Who is the referent of the pronoun 'they'? What would the main clause of this sentence be? What happens when they see us?* are all questions that may legitimately be triggered by the producers' linguistic choice. The 'logogenetic unfolding of meaning' (M.A. Halliday and C. Matthiessen, *Construing*) then continues towards the right hand-side, where the protagonists are portrayed partially overhung by the American flag, metonymically representing the Country as a whole . The entire image can thus be processed as a powerful visual metaphor projecting the idea that the black people in America are likely to be cast in the shadow by the power and the institutions controlled by the Whites. Additionally, the flag also represents an obstacle to the characters' upward vision, a fact that may open-up racial identity issues. It is also not without significance that the characters have been represented by means of an 'Offer Picture', i.e. a picture in which the represented participants are not looking towards the viewer, thus being denied the possibility of even a symbolic interaction with the world outside the frame (Kress and van Leeuwen). Thanks to the integration of verbal and visual resources, the viewers are therefore likely to infer that the missing main clause in the verbal part is to be replaced by the message conveyed by the image: possible interpretations include options like *When they see us, we cannot see them*, *When they see us, we are covered/hidden*, *When they see us, we have no right to personal identity*, etc.

At this point, the viewers' expectations regarding possible narrative scenarios have been prompted in different directions, all of them addressing situations of oppression, injustice, racial violence. Crucially, since pronouns

generally relate anaphorically to entities/people who have been mentioned earlier in the narrative, the use of ‘they’ and ‘us’ creates the impression of an ongoing situation: in other terms, it is as if the polarisation between the two groups portrayed by the show was just a further example of a well-established scenario.

The second textual ‘threshold’ viewers encounter coincides with the very first scenes of the show, which prove central to the mental formation of key narrative aspects like characters, settings, worldviews. In addition to features like lexical choices, accent, paralinguistic information,¹ all of them heavily contributing to the creation of a specific idea of a character in the viewers’ minds – other elements prove fundamental for the ‘text furnishing’ and its underlying ‘laws’ (Dolezel and Ronen): types of shots, characters’ surroundings, soundtrack and intertextual references all have the potential to *refresh* or *reinforce* viewers’ schemata regarding a particular situation (Cook). In other words, the viewers’ mental schemata previously activated by the paratext may be *reinforced* by the events occurring in the initial moments of the show or *subverted* by means of representational strategies that contradict the viewers’ expectations.

Let us observe how the plot unfolds, starting from these assumptions: in the very first shots of episode 1, Antron McCray is represented with his father while eating a hamburger and French fries and talking about football. In the following scene, Korey Wise is shown while skipping school and going to buy fried chicken. In the third scene, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana and Yusef Salaam are portrayed sauntering round Harlem to a typical rapper-style beat. The language the different characters speak in these opening scenes is typical African American Vernacular English (AAVE henceforth), with no dialect shifts occurring: examples of this include ‘ain’t’ for negations (“Whoa, I ain’t no traitor”, “If he ain’t a Yankee, nothing to root for”, used by Antron), sentences with no verb (“You cold, Tron”, used by Antron’s father), the verb form ‘gonna’ without a preceding copula (“A’ight, we gonna see” used by Antron’s father), and in general sentence constructions that may be considered ‘non-standard’ (“How come you never hungry?”, “Everything better with you”, pronounced by Korey Wise, “Don’t let’s get there first”, pronounced by Raymond Santana) and convey a low level of education (Queen 137). This type

¹ For a detailed list of resources used for character presentation, see Trevisan (*Characterization* 54-59).

of language is combined with a soundtrack dominated by a typical rap rhythm, with pitches increasing when the characters are represented as a group.

Right from the start, then, different semiotic resources co-pattern to produce a series of characters we may refer to as ‘flat’ (Forster)²: they all seem to be constructed around the same behavioural and linguistic patterns, which include eating junk food, talking about baseball,³ using the same words and syntactic constructions. This representation of the characters’ cultural identity – especially meaningful since it occurs at the beginning of the narrative – may thus be interpreted as another possibility for filling in the missing main-clause in the show’s title: when they (the white Americans) see us (the African-Americans), trite stereotypes are likely to be applied, regardless of specific personal identities.

Crucially, the types of shots characterising this opening part seem to reinforce the ideological polarisation created by the paratext and the initial scenes. *Fig.2* and *Fig.3* capture events occurring in the first two minutes of episode 1.



FIG.2: group of black people walking towards Central Park

² Flat characters, according to Forster, are relatively uncomplicated and stereotypical, and do not change throughout the narrative. By contrast, round characters are complex and undergo development, not rarely surprising the reader.

³ Quite significantly, the shot opening the TV-Show is a baseball that one of the characters plays with.



FIG.3: group of black people spending time outside a fast-food restaurant

In both scenes, the black characters are portrayed by means of ‘high angle’ shots, i.e. a typical technique symbolically removing power away from the represented participants and conferring it to the viewers (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). These shots may therefore be interpreted as yet another possible way to formulate the missing main clause in the title: “When they see us, they do so from a higher perspective”/ “When they see us, they see a group of very similar people, not single individuals”.

Things change drastically when the white characters appear for the first time: after a jogger called Trisha Meili has been assaulted and raped in Central Park, Detective Linda Fairstein and some police officers reach the location where the rape took place to gather initial evidence. Their arrival is depicted in *Fig. 4*.

Unlike the black characters, Detective Fairstein is portrayed by means of a ‘low angle’ shot, interpersonally providing power to her (Kress and van Leeuwen 140)⁴: quite significantly, she is portrayed alone, as an *individual* and not simply as a *group member*. Moreover, all the other semiotic resources are momentarily ‘paused’ when she appears, with no soundtrack or words being recorded. One of the first questions she asks is: “Did you pick up any gays, or homeless, or anything?” another way in which the ideological polarisation

⁴ I use the term ‘interpersonally’ following Halliday’s stratification of meaning into three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, textual (*Social, Experience, Introduction*).



FIG. 4: Detective Fairstein represented for the first time

between US (the ‘righteous’ whites who could certainly not be ‘gay’ or ‘homeless’ and, therefore, definitely not potentially responsible for the assault) and THEM (all those who are not part of the US group) is created. This opposition is further reinforced by other linguistic options such as “OUR lady jogger”, or Donald Trump’s request to bring back “OUR Police”, while the black characters keep being addressed through strongly evaluative expressions that threaten their positive face (Brown and Levinson). Examples include the words “animals”, “little bastards”, “bunch of turds”.

What happens in the paratext and in the first minutes of the show is therefore crucial for positioning the viewers with respect to the upcoming narrative events. In particular, the different visual treatments of the characters, combined with variations in the language they use (AAVE always spoken by the black characters, standard English always spoken by the white characters) strongly contribute to the preliminary outline of the powerful ideological polarisation underlying the whole TV series.

4. LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGY

As mentioned above, variation in language use is one of the key resources used to foreground the opposition between the two groups: the black characters

are represented almost exclusively through the use of the AAVE variety, while the white group is given the possibility to shift from more standard American English to very informal speech options which include taboo words like “bastards” or “animals”, used to prove their power while addressing the black characters. The fact that the black characters are only portrayed while using AAVE is not without significance, as it is well-known that not all African-Americans in real life necessarily speak this variety: alternative representational options could have been used but it was decided to only portray them linguistically in this way. In Halliday’s words, “where there is choice there is meaning” (*Social* 6).

The US versus THEM polarisation construed by means of language is made explicit from the initial moments of the show: during the preliminary interrogations, one of the black characters declares that on the night of the jogger’s assault he was spending time “wilding out”⁵ with his friends, an expression that both Detective Fairstein and the other police officers struggle to make sense of. Not only do they struggle with the word meaning, but they also seem to struggle with how the word is spelt: in turn, Detective Fairstein reads it as “Willing”, “Wheeling”, “Wiling out”. When she can finally identify the correct spelling, she repeatedly asks both her colleagues and the black characters what the meaning of the expression is. The same expression is also used in a newspaper headline at the beginning of episode 2, thus becoming a ‘plot device’ to move the story forward and help the white characters assemble their narrative.

More generally, the relation between language and ideology in the show can be better captured by means of quantitative methods that isolate all the words pronounced by the characters we are interested in. The remaining part of this section will thus introduce a possible application of corpus methods to identify recurrent language patterns which may prove central to the formation of ideology. The software used for the analysis is W-Matrix⁶. To start with, five different files were collected:

⁵ The expression ‘Wilding out’ is typically slang and refers to a behaviour that goes against the normal rules or standard.

⁶ W-Matrix has been created by Professor Paul Rayson at the University of Lancaster (UK). For details, see <<https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/>>

1. A file containing all the words pronounced by the black characters in the four episodes
2. A file containing all the words pronounced by the police officers in the four episodes
3. A file containing all the words pronounced by the Detective Fairstein in the four episodes
4. A file containing all the words pronounced by the white characters during the interrogations
5. A file containing all the words pronounced by the black characters during the interrogations

Each of these files is a mini-corpus that can be analysed by means of tools like *Keyness* (which indicates the most frequent words in a corpus, when compared to another corpus), *Part of Speech frequency* (POS henceforth, which identifies the most frequent parts of speech in a given corpus), *Semantic categories* and *Semantic keyness* (which identify the most frequent semantic patterns in a given corpus or in comparison with another one)⁷.

To start identifying potential ideological patterns, the most frequent ‘areas of meaning’ emerging from the dialogue of the white protagonist were first identified by running a semantic keyness analysis on file 3 and file 1: since Detective Fairstein is the character who is in charge of the investigation, the meanings she produces are very indicative of the type of narrative the white people intend to create. *Fig. 5* shows the actual occurrences of the most frequent semantic area [violence] permeating her language.

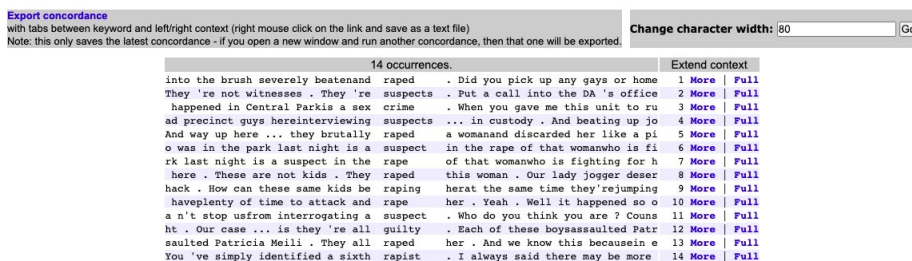


FIG. 5: Occurrences of the key meaning area in Fairstein’s language

⁷ For a detailed introduction to the use of corpus techniques for stylistic purposes, see McIntyre and Walker and Bednarek (TV Dialogue).

The most frequent words she pronounces in the whole show belong to the semantic areas of violence: in particular, the word “rape” is overused, together with its variants “rapist” and “raping”. Noticeably, other key words she uses are “guilty” and “suspects”: these lexical items are uttered from the very start, long before the trial has actually begun. This sheds light on her tendency to use prejudices towards the black teenagers, since she goes well-beyond merely suspecting their guilt but takes it for granted and in doing so she resorts to a discourse strategy analysts call *presupposition* (Fairclough; Han). In other words, she presents their guilt as a point of fact, so that all the actions reported afterwards are to be interpreted as inevitable consequences that do not need to be questioned. This strategy is corroborated by another one: the white characters very rarely use the black characters’ proper names, a fact that contributes to denying/obfuscating their identity even more. In this regard, during an interview held on the Ophra Winfrey Show, the series director Ava DuVernay remarked that “We need to know them and say their names”.

To second step in the corpus investigation was a keyness analysis using file 1 as the target corpus and file 3 as the reference corpus. By doing so, the most frequent language structures used by the black characters (as compared to Fairstein) were singled out.

... Oh man careful with that !	Oh	y'all real funny . Y'all got jok	17	More	Full
an na see Where y'all watches ?	Oh	shit . What 's that ? Tell me th	18	More	Full
They probably just wildin out .	Yo	let 's go Saturday . Saturday it	19	More	Full
go Saturday . Saturday it is .	Yo	is that Deondre coming for us ?	20	More	Full
is that Deondre coming for us ?	No	that 's Al Morris . He cool . Co	21	More	Full
id NoI know what I said Corey .	No	. " There you go taking all my f	22	More	Full
know what I said Corey . No . "	There you go	taking all my food . Yo ! Pollo	23	More	Full
ere you go taking all my food .	Yo	! Pollo ! Let 's go we 're going	24	More	Full
ght you was hungry . Come onBut	I mean	... I better look out there ...	25	More	Full
... I better look out there ...	No	Corey ! No ! Corey for realI 'll	26	More	Full
r look out there ... No Corey !	No	! Corey for realI 'll be a few m	27	More	Full
tay . I promise . Ten minutes .	All right	let 's go ! Five minutes baby .	28	More	Full
let 's go ! Five minutes baby .	Hey	yo ! Yo what do you think they '	29	More	Full
's go ! Five minutes baby . Hey	yo	! Yo what do you think they 're	30	More	Full
! Five minutes baby . Hey yo !	Yo	what do you think they 're doing	31	More	Full
minutes baby . Hey yo ! Yo what	do you think	they 're doing ? I do n't know .	32	More	Full
about that . I got that new ...	Hey	! Yo you seeing this ? Yo ! Hey	33	More	Full
that . I got that new ... Hey !	Yo	you seeing this ? Yo ! Hey man w	34	More	Full
... Hey ! Yo you seeing this ?	Yo	! Hey man watch out ! Back off !	35	More	Full
Hey ! Yo you seeing this ? Yo !	Hey	man watch out ! Back off ! Ah wh	36	More	Full
Hey man watch out ! Back off !	Ah	what have we got here ? What you	37	More	Full
's the cops ! I swear I did n't	doI	'm here for my son . He 's in th	38	More	Full
e 's in the eighth grade . I 'm	sorry	. I got ta work . I was sleeping	39	More	Full
ot ta work . I was sleeping ...	No	my son never gave me no problems	40	More	Full
.. We have translators here ...	Uh	nothing . I was n't doing anythi	41	More	Full
. I was n't doing anything ...	Um	... Uh I was out with my boy Tro	42	More	Full
s n't doing anything ... Um ...	Uh	I was out with my boy Tron . Um	43	More	Full
Uh I was out with my boy Tron .	Um	... Antron McCray . He live arou	44	More	Full
owing stuff . That was n't cool	you know	? he said some kids werercausing	45	More	Full
en he left . We left . You left	huh	? How you get mud on your pants	46	More	Full
Tron we talked about this man !	You know	better than that ! I taught you	47	More	Full
n na be downtown for ? No sir .	Yo	he stays there all the time . No	48	More	Full

FIG 6: Keyness analysis of semantic areas: Black characters compared to Fairstein

Here, a totally different picture emerges: the black characters’ most frequent words are, indeed, ‘non-words’: hesitations (“Uh”, “Um”, “Oh”), discourse markers (“you know”) and in general terms deprived of ideational meanings⁸. A possible interpretation of this result is the very limited possibilities allotted to the black characters for the production of actual linguistic content: by being statistically over-represented in their language, expressions like “Yo”, “Yeah”, “Huh” and “Hey” can be interpreted as ‘signature interjections’ (Bednarek, *Fictional* 130) for those characters, conveying the fact that white and black characters cannot express themselves equally. Indeed, characters belonging to the same group are ‘affiliated’ by their use or non-use of these types of interjections: the white ones never use them, the black ones do so at a significantly high level.

The unfair treatment experienced by the black characters is even more striking when the corpus analysis is applied to files 4 and 5, which collect all the words pronounced by the two groups during the interrogation.

Item	O1	i1	O2	i2	LL	LogRatio
1 List1 List2 Concordance G2.1-	9	1.17	0	0.00 +	5.24	2.60
2 List1 List2 Concordance A5.1+	9	1.17	0	0.00 +	5.24	2.60
3 List1 List2 Concordance M2	8	1.04	0	0.00 +	4.65	2.43
4 List1 List2 Concordance T1.1.3	7	0.91	0	0.00 +	4.07	2.24
5 List1 List2 Concordance S8+	5	0.65	0	0.00 +	2.91	1.76
6 List1 List2 Concordance B2-	5	0.65	0	0.00 +	2.91	1.76
7 List1 List2 Concordance Z99	48	6.23	10	3.85 +	2.14	0.70
8 List1 List2 Concordance M6	19	2.47	3	1.15 +	1.79	1.10
9 List1 List2 Concordance X2.1	3	0.39	0	0.00 +	1.75	1.02
10 List1 List2 Concordance W2	3	0.39	0	0.00 +	1.75	1.02
11 List1 List2 Concordance T1.1.2	3	0.39	0	0.00 +	1.75	1.02
12 List1 List2 Concordance B1	3	0.39	0	0.00 +	1.75	1.02
13 List1 List2 Concordance Z5	157	20.39	43	16.54 +	1.54	0.30
14 List1 List2 Concordance A1.1.1	18	2.34	3	1.15 +	1.51	1.02
15 List1 List2 Concordance X9.2+	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
16 List1 List2 Concordance X3.3	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
17 List1 List2 Concordance X2.5+	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
18 List1 List2 Concordance T1.1.1	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
19 List1 List2 Concordance S7.4+	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
20 List1 List2 Concordance S3.2	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
21 List1 List2 Concordance O4.6-	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
22 List1 List2 Concordance O4.1	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
23 List1 List2 Concordance L1-	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
24 List1 List2 Concordance G2.1	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43
25 List1 List2 Concordance E6-	2	0.26	0	0.00 +	1.16	0.43

FIG. 7: Keyness analysis of semantic areas during the interrogation: White compared to Black

The semantic area emerging with higher statistical frequency during the interrogations is ‘crime’. This is perfectly in line with the already-observed strategy used by Fairstein to create a ‘narrative of guilt’ well before the actual outcome of the trial. Furthermore, it is noticeable how the black characters have very few possibilities of speech compared to the white ones: as a matter of fact,

⁸ In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the expression ‘ideational meanings’ refers to ‘content meaning’, unlike the interpersonal meanings which refer to the relation among speakers, and to textual meanings which refer to the way in which the text has been organised.

the actual number of words they are allotted during the interrogations is 257, whereas the whites are granted 802. In addition to other considerations that may be formulated, this situation clashes with the viewers' typical expectations of the 'trial genre', traditionally structured into the prosecutor's short questions and the defendant's longer answers. What happens here is exactly the opposite: the ones who are asked to answer the prosecutors' questions are not actually allowed to do so properly, as they are not allocated the necessary amount of words to actually tell their version of the events. On the contrary, the members of the jury have access to a vast array of linguistic resources which guarantees the enrichment of the narrative triggered by Detective Fairstein.

Moreover, during the trial the black characters are often addressed by means of face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson) as evidenced by nouns like "liar" or by verbs like "grunt" that attribute animal properties to them. Statements like "You have been proven guilty" also contribute to damaging the black characters' face: incidentally, these sentence types are highly manipulative as they take something for granted without providing any further explanation. The decision to resort to passive constructions rather than to active ones indeed grants speakers the possibility to 'delete agency', i.e. to specify that something happened without actually needing to explain who the agent carrying out the action is. The statement "You have been proven guilty" sounds like a 'given' situation (even if the outcome of the trial has not been communicated yet) in which all the attention is focused on the "You": the agent who proved them guilty is not specified, mainly because no one could have done so at this point in the plot.

The worldview of the white characters is also very clearly conveyed by the metaphorical patterns that permeate their language: as demonstrated by several studies, metaphors are closely related to mind style, i.e. the peculiar way in which a character makes sense of the world (Semino; Semino and Steen; Semino and Swindlehurst; Trevisan, *Mind*). In WTSU, the white characters tend to use metaphors that relate to the source domain of CATASTROPHE as in "This is an epidemic we are not in control of" referred to the presumed violence perpetrated by African-Americans or Latino people in the USA. The CATASTROPHE source domain is in line with the extensive, ideologically-loaded use of 'flood metaphors' in the media to talk about immigrants documented in the main media outlets (Charteris-Black; Strom and Alcock). Detective Fairstein largely deploys metaphors related to the semantic field of violence, such as "Those bastards shot their wad into a sock, thinking we

wouldn't find it": the verb "shoot" is generally used in settings of war or more generally of violence, therefore this is again to be interpreted in the light of the Catastrophe source domain. Clearly, the use of these metaphor types adds to the already-noted linguistic strategies aimed at damaging the black characters' face and creating distance, besides further enhancing the US and THEM polarisation permeating the whole show.

6. LANGUAGE AND CHARACTERISATION

Many are the resources that can be used for the construction of a character in telecinematic environments: language, images, sounds, type of shots, etc. WTSU is particularly emblematic from this point of view, since at least two characters are construed by means of a very peculiar combination of semiotic resources: Detective Fairstein and Korey Wise. This section will therefore focus on them, devoting more space to Korey Wise, as the former has been at least partially discussed in the previous parts of this paper.

As pointed out in section 3, in her very first appearance Detective Fairstein is portrayed by means of a low-angle shot that makes her be perceived as very powerful. This choice in representation is even more significant as it strongly deviates from an intra-textual norm previously established in the general representation of characters. Other elements that contribute to her foregrounding⁹ are the soundtrack, that is suddenly paused when she appears, and her language: she uses taboo words with her colleagues from the beginning ("what the fuck was she doing here?") in addition to highly offensive expressions addressed to the African Americans who were spending time in Central Park on that same night.

Because of these choices in her representation, traits like 'arrogance', 'boldness', 'rudeness' are likely to be attributed to her by viewers from the beginning of the first episode. This impression is then reinforced in the following scenes, both through the content of her utterances and through the way in which these utterances are expressed: to start with, she is the one who initiates the 'guilt narrative' without any intention of modifying it even after her colleagues point out to her that her reconstruction of the events has many weak points. Secondly, she continues to use very offensive language when she

⁹ For the notion of 'Foregrounding', see Emmott and Alexander.

talks about the black characters, repeatedly labelling them as “animals”, “little bastards”, “fuckers”. Thirdly, she repeatedly threatens her own colleagues’ face by means of expressions like “Are you listening to yourself? You sound delusional”, “I am sick of this shit”, or by using manipulative expressions like “The whole country is watching. They are watching you” (all of them addressed to Elizabeth Lederer, the lawyer who leads the prosecution and who has difficulties in accepting Fairstein’s narrative).

Corpus investigations like those introduced in section 3 are very useful for the study of characterisation, as they can better help in identifying language patterns that are peculiar to a specific character. To collect more evidence regarding Fairstein’s character traits, after comparing her language to that of the black characters (see previous section), a similar analysis was conducted using her colleagues’ words as reference corpus. The primary reason for this type of analytical choice is that, while it may be somehow expected (though not justified) that she could exert her power by means of offensive language patterns with the black characters, when it comes to exchanges with her colleagues, power is normally balanced equally among the speakers. Therefore, the language patterns used in her exchanges with them are likely to index personal traits that are specifically hers. While it has already been observed how she tends to impose her will by threatening her equals’ face, further traits may be identified by observing the results of this second type of investigation.

22 occurrences.		Extend context
and start getting some information . We	've got a lady rapedand clinging to l	1 More Full
problematic.i This is an epidemic . We	are not in control . And we can be .	2 More Full
idemic . We are not in control . And	we can be . Call me as soon as you make	3 More Full
leading bound . Naked . And to think	we were gon na releasethese animals to f	4 More Full
t strong ... Come on guys . What did	we miss ? Let 's get an army of blue up	5 More Full
kidwho was in the park last night . We	've got suspectswe 've got kids in cu	6 More Full
it happened so obviously there was . We	still got ta tape 'em . Those are gra	7 More Full
cia Meili . They all raped her . And	we know this becausein each of these boy	8 More Full
r eyewitnessagainst each other . All	we need is for oneof these little shitst	9 More Full
ts to tie this whole thing together . We	have a sock . Those little bastards s	10 More Full
s shot their wadinto a sock thinking	we would n't find it but we found it . W	11 More Full
ck thinking we would n't find it but	we found it . Who cares ? We have it now	12 More Full
ind it but we found it . Who cares ?	We have it now . And the kicker is none	13 More Full
none of the defenseis aware yet . So	we can test it right before the trial .	14 More Full
I do if it helps a jury believewhat	we know is true . We 've still got the c	15 More Full
a jury believewhat we know is true . We	've still got the cervical DNA . Whic	16 More Full
e 's the line ? Huh ? Fucking city !	We hear something gruesomewe grimace and	17 More Full
ear something gruesomewe grimace and	we move on . Well not this time . They w	18 More Full
part fitinto the whole . That is all	we did . It 's too late for this . Like	19 More Full
tives dida brilliant investigation . We	got justice for a womanwho was violat	20 More Full
violated in the most gruesome way . We	got justice for a woman who was useda	21 More Full
like garbage . Those boys did that . We	helped make surethey got what they de	22 More Full

FIG. 8: Part of Speech Analysis: Fairstein compared to her colleagues

As the figure shows, the most significant pattern Fairstein uses is the first-person plural pronoun "we". This result is quite revealing in terms of personal traits, as it clearly indicates her habit of strategically including all her colleagues in her opinions and decisions, even when those opinions/decisions are exclusively hers. By resorting to the 'inclusive we' construction, she uses a typical strategy commonly found in political discourse: in order to influence their potential audience, politicians often employ "we" to construe a public that is supposed to share their values, ideas and feelings (Vertommen). Similarly, although it is Fairstein who constructs the narrative by repeatedly silencing whoever sees flaws in her description of the events, she uses language in a way that simulates the sharing and agreement of her ideas and behaviour among all the police officers. By doing so, she strategically allocates responsibility for her decisions to all the others, in case anything should go wrong during the trial. Additional traits like 'hypocrisy' or 'insincerity' may therefore be attributed to her.

Overall, the combination of semiotic resources distributed across the episodes contributes to the creation of an extremely obnoxious character whom viewers are likely to despise: one of the crucial consequences of this is the almost immediate feeling of empathy with the characters who populate the other group, of whom Korey Wise is the most important exponent.

Korey's importance for the plot of the show is made clear from the first moments of episode 1, when he is represented while eating and chatting with the girl he is in love with. This initial scene is crucial to the subsequent development of the character and will be repeatedly re-enacted in his mind for many years to come. In the initial scene, when some of his friends pass by and try to persuade him to join them, he is at first torn between his desire to stay with his girlfriend and the 'call of loyalty' to his pals. His decision to join them will result in 12 years of imprisonment. Quite strikingly, despite his decision to join his friends, he is not initially among the suspects: as a matter of fact, when Yusef Salam is taken into custody for questioning by the police, Korey decides to go with him to provide moral support but finds himself summarily pulled into the interrogation room and eventually accused like all the others.

During the initial interrogation, which takes place without any supervision of a parent or a guardian¹⁰, the police manipulate him by promising that he will soon be allowed to return home if he agrees to the plot of the narrative they

¹⁰ Korey Wise was sixteen at the time, therefore police was legally allowed to question him without any supervision.

are assembling. He thus becomes the unwitting participant in a downright schooling aimed at learning verbatim the version of events that the detectives have prepared: their efforts, initially, appear quite useless, since Korey is literally incapable of remembering the parts of the story he is expected to learn. On the one hand, the texts he produces are full of hesitations, false starts, repetitions, mistakes; on the other hand, he finds it very hard to stay focused, and is therefore likely to be perceived as a character with some mental impairment and social drawbacks.

Visually, the moments portraying his 'rehearsal' are characterised by high angle shots that symbolically deprive him of any agency and power. When Korey is finally able to learn the story and record it as an official confession, he finds out that instead of being released he will be charged of rape and locked in a room with the other four. It is at this point that all five characters realise they have been duped and detained by the detectives in spite of a total lack of solid evidence.

Besides marking the end of WTSU's first episode, this scene also coincides with the initial, significant changes in the characters' attitude and behaviour, powerfully symbolised by a transition in their representation: low-shots replace high ones, eye-contact with the police officers is maintained and not avoided anymore, camera focus is on single characters and not on them as part of a group. As far as their language is concerned, it gradually becomes more straightforward, with fewer hesitations and false starts: these changes, conveyed by the combination of the different semiotic resources, contribute to creating the impression of intensified agency.

Episode 4, almost entirely devoted to Korey Wise, well captures this evolution. When he is proclaimed guilty of assault and sexual abuse, he is still very frightened and somewhat paralysed in his actions. The images recording his first days in the (in)famous Rikers Island adult prison are emblematic of this agentless state¹¹: *Fig. 9* portrays his attempt to escape a fight started by his fellow prisoners during lunch; *Fig. 10* records one of the first moments of violence he actually suffers in jail, while the prison guard remains silent and inactive.

¹¹ Korey is the only one among the five who was sent to an adult prison since he was sixteen at the time. All the others were sent to a correction facility.



FIG 9: Korey represented as a victim during a fight in the prison canteen



FIG. 10: Korey experiencing violence and abuse

As far as language is concerned, at this point in the story it still features many unfinished sentences (“I was just going..”), double negations (“I don’t want no trouble”) and hesitations (“I..I..didn’t do nothing”). Interestingly, however, some initial, basic changes can be detected: these changes include, for example, the increasing use of speech acts (“Stop! Stop!”) and frequent shifts to standard English as in “What am I supposed to do? Let them do whatever they want?”; “I was hoping I could see you before now”, which didn’t occur in the previous episodes.

The scene following *Fig. 10* marks a crucial moment in Korey's trajectory from *type* to *individual*: during one of his mum's visits, he suddenly changes his body posture and moves his hands from underneath the table to its top. At the same time, he communicates his intention to leave Rikers Island for a better prison by means of sentences characterised by very high modality indexing his newly-acquired agency: "I'll make it easier. I will write up a transfer. I can get help from the library". Shortly after, he is portrayed while chit-chatting with the guard who had done nothing to interrupt the aggression shown in *Fig. 10*: when the guard asks if he is ok, he replies by saying "You tell me", followed by the guard's words "they are not fucking with you anymore". Crucially, Korey's last retort is "not today", which sounds very promising for the viewers' expectations regarding his personal development. From this moment, Korey indeed undergoes a drastic personal change that will soon turn him into a radically different version of himself, in spite of the fact that violence, physical and psychological, continues in the new prison. Korey's change in attitude encompasses radical modifications both in the way he uses language and in the way he is visually represented¹².

To investigate the changes occurring at a linguistic level, two small corpora were collected, the first one including all the words pronounced by Korey from episode 1 to this point in episode 4 (K1 henceforth), the second one containing all the remaining words he pronounces in the show (K2 henceforth). A keyness analysis was conducted using K2 as target corpus and K1 as reference corpus: this was aimed at investigating the patterns emerging with statistically significant frequency in K2's version of the character when compared to K1.

Strikingly, the word which turned out to be statistically overused in K2 is "no", i.e. - the very same word the character was not able to pronounce in episode 1 when his friends insisted on him joining them. As it turns out, many parts of ep. 4 show Korey's mind 'at work' while simulating a different outcome for the events narrated in episode 1: in all his mental projections of a different state of affairs, the word "no" is consistently central. In some ways, being now able to use it coincides with the possibility/ability to emancipate himself from the stereotypical representations previously discussed.

The keyness analysis of words was complemented by a keyness analysis of semantic domains. The areas of meaning the character overuses in his second version are those of 'negation', 'boosting' and 'speech acts'. If the 'semantics of

¹² For reasons of space, just two language patterns and two representational strategies will be briefly discussed below.

negation' is straightforwardly related to the overuse of the word "no" discussed above, 'boosting' and 'speech acts' indicate totally different linguistic phenomena: on the one hand, 'boosting' shows that the 'developed' version of the character uses linguistic strategies aimed at amplifying the content of his utterances, thus demonstrating that he now has the power to firmly assert what he believes in; on the other hand, the very high frequency of speech acts indicates that the adult Korey *does things with words* (Austin), i.e. he is more agentive.

The options selected by the producers at the visual level of representation co-pattern significantly with the strategies discussed at the verbal one. First of all, in episode 4 Korey is often portrayed as the protagonist of 'visual acts' (Queen 56), i.e. through shots in which he now *acts* upon the story-world rather than being the passive subject of acts initiated by others.



FIG. 11: 'visual act'

In *Fig. 11*, for example, he is represented while imposing his will for the first time while choosing what should be watched on TV in the common room. Before doing so, he repeatedly says "no" to his fellow prisoners who are interested in some other TV programs. Moreover, he is also repeatedly shown while he is involved in fights, but at this point in his personal development he does not escape anymore, nor does he seem at all frightened as was the case in *Fig. 9*.

Secondly, the different phases of his personal evolution are closely associated to a drastic change in shot angles. *Fig. 12* exemplifies the typical shot type portraying Korey in episode 4.



FIG. 12: Korey Wise in Episode 4

Not only is Korey now represented by means of low-angles warranting him power and self-confidence, he is also repeatedly depicted through close shots simulating intimacy with the viewers (Kress and van Leeuwen 124). In other words, the shot types selected mimic close personal distance, thus turning him into ‘one of us’, i.e. someone belonging to the viewers’ world. In addition to this, ‘demand pictures’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 116), i.e. pictures in which the represented participant’s gaze forms a vector pointing outside the frame, are now repeatedly used, thus interpersonally simulating contact between the character and the viewer, even if only at an imaginary level. Finally, shots portraying Korey in this episode are typically impregnated by an unusual amount of brightness, with all its possible connotations in terms of ‘life’, ‘knowledge’, spirituality, etc.

Overall, different semiotic resources are combined to produce a specific image of the characters in the viewers’ minds: Detective Fairstein is mainly construed linguistically both by a repeated use of taboo words and by a significant use of plural personal pronouns. The first are aimed at dramatising the content of her speech and at creating distance from the black characters. The second are aimed at distributing the responsibility for her own decisions among the whole group of her fellow white colleagues. The options at the visual level corroborate the linguistic ones and are all

aimed at representing her as a very powerful character. Korey, on the other hand, is mainly construed by a number of semiotic options that contribute to turning him into an *individual*: these include an intensive use of speech and visual acts and a massive resort to the adverb "no" as an emancipation strategy. At the visual level of representation, changes regard mainly the interpersonal metafunction: shot angles, distance, and 'demand pictures' instead of 'offer pictures'.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Educators and scholars have long argued for the need to incorporate multimodal literacy in the school curricula (Jewitt; Kress; Kress and van Leeuwen; Painter *et al.*; Unsworth, "Multiliteracies", *Curriculum*). Indeed, in today's globalised society, the demands of meaning-making practices require complex new ways of coding and decoding image-text relations: in particular, analysing and critically interpreting multimodal texts (e.g. websites, videos, online news, social media postings, posters, banners and so on) has become an indispensable skill.

This paper has hopefully demonstrated that in the contemporary 'semiotic landscape' it is essential to extend student multiliteracy skills development into a relatively new arena: televisual literacy. Since TV shows are consumed worldwide, it is legitimate to expect that they may exert a certain degree of influence both in the language and in the attitudes of millions of people across the whole globe (Bednarek, "Nerdiness"). This process is not without risks, especially in terms of manipulation. As a matter of fact, televisual products may contain 'residual ideologies' mirroring those of the most powerful groups in society: sexual behaviour, family relations, ways of speaking, types of food consumed, skin colour are only some examples of the ideologies that may be *naturalised* at the expense of the minority groups. In Gramsci's terms, popular series are often the world of the dominant ideologies, therefore they may organise "consensus around dominant ideological conceptions" (Purvis and Thornham 80).

Values and stereotypical assumptions about groups are often embodied by specific characters with whom the audience is invited to identify. Not uncommonly, these characters are often the most likable ones, a fact which makes bonding and affiliation processes much easier. Language plays a crucial

role in this process, contributing significantly to the creation of a “believable blend of individual traits with more general social types/identities” (Queen 175). Fostering a student’s capacity to analyse the effects of a character’s language is hence crucial to his/her understanding of social identities, ideologies and stereotypes.

The different sections of the present contribution are an attempt to go in that direction: specifically, each part of the paper has aimed to show how the thematisation of cultural assumptions about ‘blackness’ is obtained through the distribution and interplay of different semiotic resources. To start with, the multimodal orchestration of elements in the paratext has been analysed to show how a specific, stereotypical representation of ‘blackness’ can trigger viewers’ expectations long before the actual beginning of the series. Secondly, specific tools for analysing ideology have been introduced: in particular, quantitative methods have been applied for comparing the language produced by the dominant and the dominated group respectively. This procedure proved crucial in observing how the silencing and marginalisation of one group at the expense of the other is obtained through language. Corpus techniques have also been used to discuss the effect of recurrent language patterns for the construction of characters: for example, the specific use of the ‘inclusive we’ by Detective Fairstein sheds light on her determination to spread the responsibility of her actions among her co-workers, even when she is the only one who decides actions and strategies. Korey, on the other hand, uses language options to emancipate himself from the previous version presented of him. Visual resources, it has been argued, are consistently co-deployed to reinforce the messages produced by the verbal mode. The final aim of this paper is therefore to show how language can challenge or reinforce hegemonic ideologies without being explicit.

Future directions for students’ empowerment may include the study of how the interpersonal metafunction is realised in the language of TV series: in particular, by focusing on the sub-system of engagement in the Appraisal framework, students could learn how stance-taking towards other characters’ value positions is achieved simultaneously by the combination of monoglossic-heteroglossic space creation in language (Martin and White), together with *evoked* versus *inscribed* attitudes in images (White). This could of course shed further light on the ways in which ideology is constructed, making students even more aware of how its hidden dynamics may work at the service of the more powerful groups.

WORKS CITED

- Austin, John Langshaw. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Baldry, Anthony, and Paul J. Thibault. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis: A Multimedia Toolkit and Coursebook*. London: Equinox, 2006.
- Bednarek, Monika. “Constructing ‘Nerdiness’: Characterisation in the *Big Bang Theory*.” *Multilingua* 31.2-3, 2012. 199-229.
- _____. “Don’t Say Crap. Don’t Use Swear Words.’–Negotiating the Use of Swear/Taboo Words in the Narrative Mass Media”. *Discourse, Context & Media* 29 (2019): 100293.
- _____. *Language and Television Series: A Linguistic Approach to TV Dialogue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- _____. *The Language of Fictional Television: Drama and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.
- _____. “The Multifunctionality of Swear/Taboo Words in Television Series”. *Emotion in Discourse* (2019): 29-54.
- _____. “The Stability of the Televisual Character: A Corpus Stylistic Case Study”. *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Ed. Roberta Piazza, Monika Bednarek, and Fabio Rossi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. 185-204.
- Bleichenbacher, Lukas. *Multilingualism in the Movies: Hollywood Characters and Their Language Choices*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2008.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Bruti, Silvia, and Gianmarco Vignozzi. “The Representation of Spoken Discourse in *Little Women*: A Journey through Its Original and Dubbed Adaptations”. *Textus* 34.1 (2021): 23-46.
- _____. “Voices from the Anglo-Saxon World: Accents and Dialects Across Film Genres”. *Status Quaestionis* (2016): 43-72.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. “Britain as a Container: Immigration Metaphors in the 2005 Election Campaign”. *Discourse & Society* 17.5 (2006): 563-81.
- Cook, Guy WD. *A Theory of Discourse Deviation: The Application of Schema Theory to the Analysis of Literary Discourse*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Leeds, 1990.

- Dolezel, Lubomir, and Ruth Ronen. "Heterocosmica: Fiction & Possible Worlds". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 69.1 (1999): 139-155.
- DuVernay, Ava. Interview with Ophra Winfrey. <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10484298/>>. Retrieved 20 January 2022
- Emmott, Catherine, and Marc Alexander. "Defamiliarization and Foregrounding." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics*. Ed. Violeta Sotirova. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. 289-302.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. London: Pearson Education, 2001.
- Forchini, Pierfranca. *The American Movie Corpus*. Milano: EDUCatt, 2021.
- _____. *Movie Language Revisited. Evidence from Multi-Dimensional Analysis and Corpora*. Amsterdam: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Forster, Edward Morgan. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1927.
- Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Genette, Gérard, and Marie Maclean. "Introduction to the Paratext." *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): 261-72.
- Halliday, Michael A. K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- _____. *Language as Social Semiotics*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978.
- _____. "Meaning as Choice". *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring Choice*. Ed. Lise Fontaine, Tom Bartlett, and Gerard O'Grady. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 15-36.
- Halliday, Michael A. K., and Christian Matthiessen. *Construing Experience through Meaning: A Language-Based Approach to Cognition*. London: A&C Black, 1999.
- Halliday, Michael A. K., and Christian Matthiessen. *An Introduction to Functional Linguistics*. London: Edward Arnold, 1985.
- "Inter-American Commission Report on Human Rights" <<https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/PoliceUseOfForceAfrosUSA.pdf>>. Retrieved 22 January 2022.
- Jeffries, Lesley, and Daniel McIntyre. *Stylistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Jewitt, Carey. "Multimodality, "Reading", and "Writing" for the 21st Century." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26.3 (2005): 315-31.
- Kozloff, Sarah. *Overhearing Film Dialogue*. Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2000.

- Kress, Gunther. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Machin, David, and Andrea Mayr. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2015.
- Martin, James, and Peter White. *The Language of Evaluation. Appraisal in English*. Berlin: Springer Nature, 2005.
- McEnery, Tony. *Corpus Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- McIntyre, Daniel, and Brian Walker. *Corpus Stylistics: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- Minutella, Vincenza. *(Re)Creating Language Identities in Animated Films: Dubbing Linguistic Variation*. Berlin: Springer Nature, 2020.
- Montemurro, Beth. "Toward a Sociology of Reality Television." *Sociology Compass* 2.1 (2008): 84-106.
- O'Halloran, Kay L., Sabine Tan, and Marissa K. L. "Multimodal Analysis for Critical Thinking". *Learning, Media and Technology* 42.2 (2015): 1-24.
- O'Halloran, Kay L. *et al.* "Multimodal Analysis within an Interactive Software Environment: Critical Discourse Perspectives." *Critical Discourse Studies* 8.2 (2011): 109-25.
- Orosz, Gábor, *et al.* "On the Correlates of Passion for Screen-Based Behaviors: The Case of Impulsivity and the Problematic and Non-Problematic Facebook Use and TV Series Watching." *Personality and Individual Differences* 101 (2016): 167-76.
- Painter, Clare *et al.* *Reading Visual Narratives: Image Analysis of Children's Picture Books*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2013.
- Pavesi, Maria. *La Traduzione Filmica*. Roma: Carocci, 2005.
- Perego, Elisa. *Accessible Communication: A Cross-Country Journey*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2020.
- Pfister, Manfred. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Purvis, Tony, and Sue Thornham. *Television Drama: Theories and Identities*. London: Macmillan Education, 2004.

- Queen, Robin. *Vox Popular: The Surprising Life of Language in the Media*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
- Salaam, Yusef. Interview with Aisha Harris. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/30/arts/television/when-they-see-us.html>>. Retrieved 20 January 2022.
- Semino, Elena. "A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to Mind Style in Narrative Fiction." *Cognitive Stylistics. Language and Cognition in Text Analysis*. Ed Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper. London: Benjamins, 2002. 95-122.
- Semino, Elena, and Gerard Steen. "Metaphor in Literature". *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Ed. Raymond W. Gibbs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 232-46.
- Semino, Elena, and Kate Swindlehurst. "Metaphor and Mind Style in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*". *Style* (1996): 143-66.
- Strom, Megan, and Emily Alcock. "Floods, Waves, and Surges: The Representation of Latino Immigrant Children in the United States Mainstream Media." *Critical Discourse Studies* 14.4 (2017): 440-57.
- Toolan, Michael. "I Don't Know What They're Saying Half the Time, but I'm Hooked on the Series": Incomprehensible Dialogue and Integrated Multimodal Characterisation in *The Wire*". *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Ed. Roberta Piazza, Monika Bednarek and Fabio Rossi. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. 161-83.
- Trevisan, Piergiorgio. *Characterisation through Language: Perspectives from Stylistics*. London: BICA Publishing, 2019.
- _____. "How to Begin to Understand This Child's Mind?: Mind Presentation of Briony Tallis in *Atonement*". *Textus* 23 (2010): 187-208.
- Unsworth, Len. *Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum*. Buckingham-Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Towards a Metalanguage for Multiliteracies Education: Describing the Meaning-Making Resources of Language-Image Interaction". *English Teaching* 5.1 (2006): 55-70.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. *Discourse and Power*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2008.
- _____. "Ideology and Discourse". *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. Ed. Michael Freedon, Sargent Lyman Tower, and Marc Stears. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 175-96.
- Vertommen, Bram. "The Strategic Value of Pronominal Choice: Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' in Political Panel Debates". *Pragmatics* 23.2 (2013): 361-83.

When They See Us. Created by Ava DuVernay, Netflix, 2019. Television.

White, Peter 2014. "The Attitudinal Work of News Journalism Images – a Search for Verbal and Visual Analogues". *Occasional Papers del CeSLic*. Ed. Donna Rose Miller. Bologna: Università di Bologna, 2014.

Index

A

Addams Family, The, 4, 15
 Adler, Richard, IX, XIV
 Alcock, Emily, 104, 118
 Aldrich, Robert, 73, 88
 Alexander, Marc, 76, 105n, 106
 Alfieri, Gabriella, 39, 63
All in the Family, 5, 15
American Family, An, 5, 15, 88
Americans, The, XI, 1-16
 Andersen, Gisle, 63
 Andropov, Yuri, 3
 Apple, Fiona, 23
 Arnold-Ratliff, Katie, 6, 15
 Astruc, Alexander, 25
 Austin, John L., 111, 115

B

Baldry, Anthony, 92, 115
 Barrie, J. M., 31
 Peter Pan, 31
 Barthes, Roland, 26
 Barton Palmer, R., 70, 87
 Bednarek, Monika, X, 92, 101, 103, 113, 115, 118
 Bendis, Brian, 73, 87
 Bergman, Ingmar, 6, 16
Bewitched, 4
 Bianculli, David, IX, XIV, 6, 15
 Bleichenbacher, Lukas, 91, 115
 Bollettieri Bosinelli, Rosa Maria, 63-64
 Booth, Wayne, 34
 Borde, Raymond, 73, 87
 Bordwell, David, 35
Breaking Bad, 11, 13, 17, 40
 Brezhnev, Leonid, 3, 12
 Brincat, Joseph M., 39, 44, 47, 63
 Brontë, Charlotte, 31

Jane Eyre, 31

Brown, Penelope, 80, 99, 104, 115
 Bruti, Silvia, 64, 91, 115
 Bucaria, Chiara, 40-41, 56, 63, 65-66
 Buntin, John, 71-72, 87
 Buonomo, Leonardo, IX, XI, 1, 132
 Bush, George H. W., 6

C

Carosso, Andrea, 75, 83, 87
 Cater, Douglass, IX, XIV
 Chandler, Raymond, 76, 87
 Charteris-Black, Jonathan, 104, 115
 Chatman, Seymour, 34
 Chaume, Frederic, 63
 Chaumeton, Étienne, 73, 87
 Chernenko, Kostantin, 3
 Chion, Michel, 19n, 36
 Contarino, Simona, 39, 63
 Cook, Guy WD., 96, 115
 Creeber, Glen, IX, XIV, 1, 15
 Culpeper, Jonathan, 118

D

D'Acci, Julie, 79, 87
 Dassin, Jules, 73, 89
 Davis, Mike, 70-71, 84, 87
Day After, The, 6, 15
 Dickens, Charles, 31
 Dietrich, René, 11, 13, 15
 Di Fortunato, Eleonora, 63, 65-66
 Di Vilio, Antonio, XII, 69, 133
 Dolezel, Lubomir, 96, 116
 Domanick, Joe, 85, 87
Double Indemnity, 20

Douglas, William, 1, 15, 25
Dragnet, 69-75, 78-80, 82-86
 Duro Moreno, Miguel, 63

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., X, 4
 Elsaesser, Thomas, 17, 36
 Family, 5
 Emmott, Catherine, 105n, 116

F

Fairclough, Norman, 92, 102, 116
 Farnham, Marynia F., 75, 88
 Fernandez, Manny, 2n, 15
 Ferro, Patrizia, 44, 63
 Fiedler, Leslie, 13, 15
 Fields, Joel, 6, 9, 16
 Fisher, Mark, 83, 87
Foolish Wives, 18
 Forchini, Pierfranca, 63-64, 91, 116
 Formentelli, Maicol, 64, 66
 Forster, Edward Morgan, 97n, 116
 Freddi, Maria, 40, 52, 55, 64
 Friday, Joe, 70, 72, 75-85
 Friedan, Betty, 75, 77-78, 87
 Furiassi, Cristiano, 42, 64, 66
 Fusillo, Massimo, 30, 36

G

Game of Thrones, 1n
 Gannon, Bill, 79, 81-85
 García De Toro, Cristina, 63
 Garner, Julia, 8

Garzone, Giuliana, 64
Gellerstam, Martin, 64
Genette, Gérard, 94, 116
Gerson, Kathleen, 79, 87
Gessen, Masha, 5, 15
Goldberg, Jonathan, 20, 27, 36
Gorbachev, Mikhail, 3
Greven, David, 88

H

Halliday, Michael A. K., 95, 98n, 100, 116
Hammond, Michael, IX, XIV
Hanks, Tom, 85
Hanson, Curtis, 8, 12, 88
Hathaway, Henry, 73, 88
Hemingway, Ernest, 23, 32
 The Old Man and the Sea, 32
He Walked by Night, 71-72
Herbst, Thomas, 64
Hoover, J. Edgar, 80
Horn, Eva, 13, 15
Huston, John, 73, 88

I

I Married a Monster from Outer Space, 4
Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 4
Izzo, Donatella, 83, 88

J

Jenkins, Henry, 24, 36
Jewitt, Carey, 113, 116
Jones, Gerald, IX, XIV
Jones, John M., IX, 3n, 16

K

Kellogg, Susan, 88
Kiss me Deadly, 73
 Kozloff, Sarah, 91, 117
 Kress, Gunther, 95, 98, 112-113, 117
 Krutnik, Frank, 73, 88

L

Lamb, Alexandra, 88
 Landrum, Jason, 13, 16
 Lesley, Jeffries, 116
 Levi, Hagai, XI, 25, 35-36
 Levinson, Stephen C., 99, 104, 115
 Lippi-Green, Rosina, 91, 117
 Lipps, Theodore, 24
 Liu, Richard, X
 Lundberg, Ferdinand, 75, 88

M

MacDonald, J. Fred, 73, 88
 Machin, David, 116
 Maclean, Marie, 94, 116
Mad Men, 13
 Mankiewicz, Tom, 85, 87
 Martin, James, 30, 64, 114, 117
 Matthiessen, Christian, 95, 116
 May, Elaine Tyler, 75, 88
 Mayr, Andrea, 116
 Mazdon, Lucy, IX, XIV
 McEnery, Tony, 92, 117
 McIntyre, Daniel, 92, 101n, 116-117
 Megan, Strom, 118
 Miller, Toby, IX, XIV
 Mintz, Steven, 79, 88

Minutella, Vincenza, 39-40, 44, 47, 49, 56-58, 62, 91, 117, 132
Mittell, Jason, IX, XIV, 18-19, 35-36, 72-74, 80, 84, 88
Modern Family, XII, 39-41, 43-44, 47-48, 53, 55, 58, 60-62
Montemurro, Beth, 91, 117
Montgomery, Robert, 73, 89
Montoro, Rocío, X
Motta, Daria, 39-40, 63, 65
Munsters, The, 4, 16

N

Nadel, Alan, 74, 80, 88
Newcomb, Horace, IX, XIV
Nussbaum, Emily, 7-8, 16

O

O'Halloran, Kay, 92
Orosz, Gábor, 91, 117
Orwell, George, 32
Animal Farm, 32
Ottoni, Filippo, 41, 65
Ozark, 1

P

Painter, Clare, 113, 117
Paltridge, Brian, X
Paolinelli, Mario, 63, 65-66
Parker, William H., 69-70
Pavesi, Maria, 39-42, 44, 52-53, 55-57, 64-66, 91, 117
Perego, Elisa, 66, 91, 117
Pfister, Manfred, 91, 117
Pulcini, Virginia, 42, 49
Purvis, Tony, 113, 117

Q

Queen, Robin, X, 91, 96, 111, 114, 118

R

Raffaelli, Sergio, 66

Reagan, Ronald, XI, 3, 12, 16

Rhys, Matthew, 5, 8

Richardson, Samuel, 17, 93, 96

Rodríguez González, Félix, 66

Romero Fresco, Pablo, 52, 66

Ronen, Ruth, 96, 116

Rossi, Fabio, 40-41, 58, 66, 115, 118

Roth, Philip, 32

American Pastoral, 32

Rowland, Robert C., 3n

Russell, Keri, 5

S

Sabin, Roger, 79, 83, 86, 88

Salinger, J. D., 32

A Catcher in the Rye, 32

Santos, Fernanda, 2n, 15

Sardo, Rosaria, 44, 63

Sarris, Andrew, 25n

Scenes from a Marriage, 6

Semino, Elena, 104, 118

Shakespeare, William, 17, 30-32

Romeo and Juliet, 30-31

Sharrett, Christopher, 70-72, 80, 85, 88

Sileo, Angela, 39-40, 50, 55-56, 66

Sirk, Douglas, 25

Sopranos, The, IX, 11, 13, 16

Spigel, Lynn, 4n, 16, 74, 88

Squid Game, X

Stedman, Raymond William, IX, XIV
Steen, Gerard, 104, 118
Steinbeck, John, 33-34, 132
 East of Eden, 33-34
 Of Mice and Men, 33
Succession, 1
Swindlehurst, Kate, 104, 118

T

Tan, Sabine, 92, 117
Thibault, Paul J., 92, 115
3rd Rock from the Sun, 4n, 16
Thirtysomething, 5, 16
Thomas, Angela, X
Thomas, June, 6, 16
Thomas, Richard, 5-6
Thornham, Sue, 113, 117
Toolan, Michael, X, 91, 118
Treem, Sarah, XI, 25, 35
Trevisan, Piergiorgio, 91-92, 96n, 104, 118, 133

U

Unsworth, Len, 113, 118

V

Van Dijk, Teun A., 92, 118
Van Leeuwen, Theo, 95, 98, 112-113
Verdi, Giuseppe, 17
Vertommen, Bram, 107, 118
Vignozzi, Gianmarco, 91, 115
Von Stroheim, Erich, 18, 36

W

Waggner, George, 84, 88

Walker, Bryan, 92, 101n, 117

Waltons, The, 5-6, 16

Warhol, Robin, 24, 36

Waugh, Evelyn, 32

Webb, Jack, XII, 69-76, 79-88

Weisberg, Joe, 2-4, 6-7, 12, 15-16

An Ordinary Spy, 2

Welker, Alfred Louis, 71-72

Wells-Lassagne, Sharon, 27

When They See Us, XII, 91-92

White, Peter, 114, 117, 119

Wilder, Billy, 20, 36

Williams, Linda, 16, 20-23, 36-37

Wilson, Tracey Scott, 6

Contributors

LEONARDO BUONOMO is Professor of Anglo-American Literature at the University of Trieste. He has written widely on nineteenth-century American literature (in particular, the literary representation of Italy), Italian American literature, and American popular culture. His most recent publications have appeared in the volumes *Nathaniel Hawthorne in Context* (2018) and *Republics and Empires: Italian and American Art in Transnational Perspective, 1840-1970* (2021), as well as in the journals *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, *Henry James Review*, *Ácoma*, *Italian Americana*, and *Humanities*. He has also edited the volume *The Sound of James: The Aural Dimension in Henry James's Work* (2021) as well as Joseph Rocchietti's 1835 novel *Lorenzo and Oonalaska* (2022). In his published writings on television, he has examined such popular series as *Bewitched*, *All in the Family*, *The Jeffersons*, *Six Feet Under*, and the TV movie *That Certain Summer*. In 2019 he served as President of the Henry James Society and is currently serving as President of the Italian Association for North American Studies.

VINCENZO MAGGITTÌ is Junior Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Roma Tre. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Roma Tre. His research focuses on the relationship between literature and other media. His publications include two books (*Lo schermo fra le righe. Cinema e letteratura del Novecento*, Liguori, 2007 and *The Great Report: incursioni tra letteratura e giornalismo*, Mimesis, 2018) and several articles, published in such journals as *Letterature d'America*, *Contemporanea*, *Between* and *Arabeschi*. His latest essays are on the iconic legacy of Frankenstein (in *Ocula*) and on two examples of intermedial rewriting of Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (in *Iperstoria*).

VINCENZA MINUTELLA holds a PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Warwick, UK. She is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures at the University of Torino. She is the director of the MA programme in Audiovisual Translation (MAVTO). Her main research interests are audiovisual translation, the dubbing of animated films and of multilingual films, the influence of the English language on dubbed Italian, audio description, humour translation, theatre translation. Her publications include the monographs *(Re)Creating Language Identities in Animated Films*.

Dubbing Linguistic Variation (Palgrave, 2021) and *Reclaiming Romeo and Juliet: Italian Translations for Page, Stage and Screen* (Rodopi, 2013) and the article “Wow! Ehi, amico. Lascia che ti spieghi... Okay? Già.’ The English Element in Dubbed Italian. The Case of Animated Films” (2021).

ANTONIO DI VILIO is a PhD student in Anglo-American literature in the joint doctoral program of the University of Trieste and the University of Udine. His research interests include California literature and culture, noir, narratology, Cold War narratives, film text, TV serial narratives and pop culture. He has published articles and reviews on authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Steve Erickson, Walter Mosley and Paul Thomas Anderson. In 2019 he earned a Master’s Degree in European and American Languages and Literatures at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. He is member of AISNA (Associazione Italiana di Studi Nord-Americani), the AISNA Graduates Forum and EAAS (European Association for American Studies). His doctoral research project focuses on the revisitation of the Sixties in the 21st century Los Angeles noir, in literature and cinema.

PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN is Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Trieste. He holds a PhD in Linguistics and Literature from the University of Udine. His research interests include stylistics, critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics for experimental stimulus design in neurolinguistics. His latest publications include “Character’s mental functioning during a ‘neuro-transition’: Pragmatic failures in ‘Flowers for Algernon’” (*Language and Literature*, 2022), “Pedagogical Stylistics through Corpora in the University Classroom: a Case-Study” (*Quaderni Cird*, 2021), “Developing Critical Multimodal Literacy in Secondary School Students” (*Forum*, 2020) and the monograph *Characterisation through Language: Perspectives from Stylistics* (Bica Publishing, 2019). He has been the Principal Investigator in a Marie-Curie International Outgoing Fellowship entitled: “Improving Dyslexic Children’s Reading Abilities: The Role of Language and Visual Attention”.