

# Fact and Fiction: The Contribution of Archives to the Study of Literary Translation

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the role of traditional physical archives within Translation Studies research, investigating the contribution that such resources can add, providing information that otherwise would not be available in existing scholarly volumes, academic journals and digital material. The question is illustrated with the specific case of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and its first two translations into Italian, carried out respectively in 1936 by Cesare Giardini and 1950 by Fernanda Pivano. Both translations were published by Mondadori, Italy's largest publishing company, as part of two different series, *I romanzi della palma* and the later *Medusa* collection.

Adopting a microhistory approach, the study of these translations, through the resource-rich archives of the *Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori* in Milan, can shed light on a number of issues that the text alone cannot provide: documentation, including the other books published in the same series, highlights the target audience that Mondadori were seeking to address; the paratextual elements of the books themselves are revealing of the prominence (or otherwise) of American literature in general and Fitzgerald in particular within the Italian literary polysystem at the time of their publication; in the case of the first translation, readers' reports on the novel indicate how the censors of the Fascist regime might receive the somewhat racy themes contained in the book, while, in the case of the 1950 translation, correspondence between the publisher, literary agents and the translator herself highlight the many issues surrounding the ultimate publication of the volume.

**Keywords :** archives, *The Great Gatsby*, translation history, archival research

## Faktai ir prasimanymai. Archyvų vaidmuo vykdant grožinės literatūros vertimo tyrimus

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas tradicinių archyvų vaidmuo atliekant vertimo tyrimus, tiriama, kokios informacijos, kurios kitaip knygose, akademiniuose žurnaluose ir elektroniniuose ištekliuose tiesiog nebūtų, jie suteikia. Remiamasi konkrečiu F. Scott Fitzgeraldo „Didžiojo Getsbio“ (1925 m.) vertimų istorijos pavyzdžiu, konkrečiai, pirmaisiais dviem – 1936 m. Cesare Giardini ir 1950 m. Fernandos Pivano – vertimais į italų kalbą. Abu vertimus skirtingose serijose („I romanzi della palma“ ir vėlesnėje „Medusa“) išleido didžiausia Italijos leidykla „Mondadori“.

Šių vertimų tyrimas taikant mikroistorijos metodą ir pasinaudojant turtingais Milano „Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori“ archyvų ištekliais gali padėti atsakyti į daug klausimų, į kuriuos tekste atsakymo nerasime, pvz., dokumentai, įskaitant kitas toje pačioje serijoje išleistas knygas, išryškina tikslią auditoriją, kuriai buvo skirti „Mondadori“ vertimai; paratekstiniai knygų elementai atskleidžia amerikiečių literatūros apskritai ir konkrečių autorių (ypač Fitzgeraldo) reikšmę italų literatūros polisistemoje jų išleidimo metu. Kalbant apie pirmąjį vertimą, skaitytojų laiškuose yra informacijos, kaip fašistinio režimo cenzoriai gali interpretuoti šiek tiek rasistinius autoriaus pareiškimus knygoje, o leidėjo, literatūros agentų ir pačios vertėjos susirašinėjimas leidžiant 1950 m. vertimą parodo, kokias problemas teko spręsti rengiant leidinių spaudai.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** archyvai, „Didysis Getsbis“, vertimų istorija, archyviniai tyrimai

## Introduction

As Anthony Pym reminds us, the output of translators ‘varies according to their cultural and historical position’ (Pym 2014, 87) and within a broader framework of historical research, translation studies is becoming increasingly interested in the lives and works of individual authors and translators, the socio-historical context surrounding both source and target text as well as the paratextual elements accompanying the words themselves. Cordingley and Montini point out how “[o]ver the past decade a new field of research has emerged that may be termed ‘genetic translation studies’. It analyses the practices of the working translator and the evolution, or genesis, of the translated text by studying translators’ manuscripts, drafts and other working documents” (2015, 1). More specifically, scholars are focusing on the role that can be played in these investigations by archives: a recent example of this was the conference held at the British Library in London ‘The Translator Made Corporeal: Translation History in the Archive’ in May 2017 as well as a number of publications on the subject (Munday 2013 and 2014; Raine 2014; Paloposki 2016). Jeremy Munday is particularly interested in translators’ personal papers and manuscripts, as a resource for the investigation of the working practices and identity of translators themselves and their interaction with other participants in the translation process. For Munday, a translator’s draft, for example, can reveal clues to linguistic decision-making as part of an investigation on translator subjectivity (2014, 72). He makes a compelling case for studying these papers to produce ‘microhistories’, in the sense of the term adopted by the historian Carlo Ginzburg who explains the approach through the metaphor of the cinematographic zoom: “A close-up look permits us to grasp what eludes a comprehensive viewing” (1993, 26). To avoid the pitfall of simply relating anecdotal, isolated episodes, or *petites histoires*, Ginzburg advocates “a constant back and forth between micro- and macrohistory, between close-ups and extreme long-shots, so as to continually thrust back into discussion the comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration” (1993, 27).

Archives can contain all manner of documents from manuscripts and other written texts such as correspondence and reviews to assorted materials including drawings, prints, maps, photographs, film, music, physical objects and, increasingly, digital files. But, unlike libraries where materials have been selected, sorted and are arranged by their principal subjects, archival practice rests on the principles of provenance and original order: materials are typically acquired in whatever groupings reflect their initial use and maintained within that structure, in chronological sequence. The business of archives is ordering, listing, storage and retrieval. As the historian Susan Grigg puts it: “The archivist is [...] an environmentalist; the librarian an architect of planned community” (1991, 233). While archival material can appear to be ‘impartial’ and ‘neutral’, much like statistics, it can however be used to support or discredit claims. Simply because it is classed as documentary evidence does not necessarily establish the content as an absolute truth. In some cases, the scholar might have a question and turn to the archive for an answer while, whether during the search for that answer or just slowing ploughing through all the material indiscriminately, there can be the serendipitous discovery of information that one would never have thought to go looking for.

A fascinating example of stumbling unawares across such material while working in the archive is that related by Michelle T. King: a historian with no connection to translation studies, she describes how her investigation into certain aspects of British colonial rule in Southeast Asia, led her to the files of the Colonial Office in the National University of Singapore library. Finding a dispatch from the governor of the Straits Settlements to his superiors in the Colonial Offices in London was revelatory: in his report, he “describes both the difficulties of Chinese translation and the multiple potential vectors for its management. He confesses that he has no idea how best to handle the situation.” His anxieties over the management of a migrant workforce with all the problems it entailed—“racial, moral, physical, not to mention pecuniary”—inspired King “to consider the construction of translation itself as a colonial problem in the Straits Settlements” (2012, 23). Before recounting this episode, King had in fact already published the findings of this investigation in a paper entitled “Replicating the colonial expert: the problem of translation in the late nineteenth-century Straits Settlements” (2009): the paper, tellingly, appears in the journal *Social History*, and, although there is frequent mention of the role of interpreters and translators within the colonial context, there are no bibliographical references to any sources within Translation Studies.

With this example in mind, it is as well to remember the opening to Christopher Rundle’s article “History through a Translation Perspective”, in which he outlines the choice facing the scholar who embarks on research on translation history:

Are we going to attempt to extrapolate the translation features we uncover in the historical context we are examining in order to contribute to a wider, general or more global history of translation [...] or are we going to address those scholars who share our historical subject and introduce them to the insights which the study of translation can offer? In short, is translation the object of our research, or is it the lens through which we research our historical object? (2011: 33)

In the light of this, the focus of this article is to examine the contribution that archives can offer research in the field of literary translation: the case study presented is based on research into the first two Italian translations of *The Great Gatsby* and is part of a wider project into the reception of Fitzgerald in Italy and the fifteen different retranslations of the same novel to date. As both these first translation were produced by the same publishing company, the present research was carried out at the *Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori* in Milan in February 2019. The name of the archive refers to the founder of the Mondadori publishing house – Italy’s largest – and his son. The archive, which is in constant expansion, covers the years from 1844 to 2014 and aims to preserve the memory of the publishing industry, safeguarding its heritage from dispersal. The material has been ordered and catalogued: some inventories, databases and journals can be accessed online. The Foundation also organises exhibitions, conferences and publications based around their collections.

### The first Italian translation of *The Great Gatsby*

What follows, therefore, is an overview of the early publishing history of *Gatsby* in Italy, based on information found in the Mondadori archive, revealed by searches for papers specifically mentioning Fitzgerald and his translators as well as more general material that informs the researcher’s awareness of the historical, political and commercial context within which the translations were produced. The year after F. Scott Fitzgerald’s arguably most famous novel was originally published in the United States, the first ever translation of *The Great Gatsby* appeared in 1926 in French, carried out by the Peruvian writer and translator Victor Llona. Italy was to wait a further ten years for its first translation, published in 1936 by Mondadori. Few published sources mention this long-out-of-print translation but the trail in the Mondadori archive begins with a typed reader’s report, dated 3rd January 1936, written by Cesare Gardini, who was, therefore, responsible for suggesting the publication of the book. As Albonetti explains, “the reader’s report was the publishing company’s first contact with the untranslated work. The general purpose of this initial step was to summarise the plot, evaluate the work’s artistic merit and commercial potential, assess any political or moral risks and suggest any cuts” (1994, 12). The mention of “risks and cuts” is symptomatic of the

fact that, by this time, Italy was fourteen years into the Fascist regime. The reader's report, therefore, was crucial in assessing the likelihood of the book being approved for publication by the censors (Wardle 2017: 127).

The very first sentence of the report addresses the question of where a potential translation would fit within Mondadori's output: "It appears to be most suitable for the Palm-tree series"<sup>1</sup>. And, indeed, handwritten, down the side of the page, is the approval of Enrico Piceni—supervisor of the series—for publication, although he does advise "some abbreviations and adaptations". The practice of placing books in collections, each with its own specific identity and characteristic elements, is part of a publishing company's development of customer fidelity through expectations of what is to be found—or not—in each series. As suggested by Giardini, Fitzgerald's novel was published within the *Romanzi della Palma* series – the Palm tree novels: the title, therefore, already suggesting something exotic.

Targeted predominantly at women, the *Palma* volumes were low-cost publications—sold at three *lire*—distributed through subscription or available for purchase at newsagents rather than the more traditional channel of bookshops. Indeed, starting with their large format, the volumes have more in common with magazines than conventional books: there are additional pages with adverts for face cream, crossword puzzles, book reviews, celebrity gossip, current affairs and even a feature where a graphologist interprets samples of handwriting sent in by the readers. From their inception in 1932, the volumes were published once a month, while, the following year, due to popular demand, issues became fortnightly. As can be ascertained from examination of the issues in the Archive, this increased frequency was suspended from 1936 until 1942 (the series would end in 1943), due to paper shortages<sup>2</sup>.

As stated, the novels were clearly targeted at a female readership, with obvious appeal to cinema-going audiences—the covers feature illustrations with Hollywood-like characters—and a strong focus on romantic intrigue. However, despite openly courting popularity, the series represents a clear editorial policy of wanting to publish foreign literature in a political and cultural environment that was less than favourable to external influence, especially from 1936 on. In total, 188 novels were published as *Palma* volumes, of which 174 were translations—mostly from English (72), German (62) and then French (22)—and, while the emphasis was very much on entertainment, some acclaimed non-Italian literary texts made their way to a large audience (e.g. Edith Whar-

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> An editorial note on p.84 of Volume 32 (*Estasi* by Fanny Hurst, 29th January 1936) patriotically assures the readers that the paper shortage will be beneficial: fewer issues means more stringent criteria in selecting future publications.

ton, Sinclair Lewis, P.G. Wodehouse and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)<sup>3</sup>. Among these novels was Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, or *Gatsby il Magnifico*, as it was published: as can be seen from Giardini's reader's report, he quotes the title in French—*Gatsby le magnifique*—and, indeed, the translation that he ultimately produced was carried out from Victor Lloná's 1926 French version and not from the original English<sup>4</sup>.

Because of their popular, magazine-like format and their distribution via subscription and newsstands, the *Palma* series novels were regarded more as disposable publications rather than highbrow literature, they were not reprinted and, as a result, very few copies remain today. The Archive, therefore, offers the valuable opportunity to view not only Giardini's translation of the *Gatsby*, but also the other volumes published alongside it in the series. In the first issues to appear, the publishing company dedicates the inside front cover to explaining how the novels have been selected for inclusion:

In launching this new Series, our Company wants to offer the most interesting novels from the contemporary literature of all countries, in agreeable editions with a practical format and affordable prices. This Series is aimed at the widest range of readers who will find something to suit all tastes. To this end, the Publisher has set up a special Commission to select the volumes to be included in each of the different categories within the Series.

The Commission is composed of an expert in Italian literature; French and English literature; German literature; Spanish literature<sup>5</sup>; Scandinavian and Oriental literature; A lady<sup>6</sup>; A member of the professions; A student from the music Conservatorio; A bookseller<sup>7</sup>; A young graduate.

As can be seen, this Commission is as eclectic as possible and has the task of choosing, for the *Romanzi della Palma*, the most interesting works, with the widest range of topics and styles, from among the countless novels published across the world. As mentioned, the Series will include novels of all descriptions: therefore, there will be tragedy and comedy as well as both delicate and shocking novels. For the convenience of readers and booksellers, there will be a coloured mark on the spine of each volume to indicate to which of the following two categories the book belongs: 1) novels that can be read by all (blue) 2) novels that cannot be read by all (red). All readers are invited to contribute: we welcome all reports of works of interest from around the world and Mondadori

<sup>3</sup> Publishing data can be found in the online catalogue of the Fondazione Mondadori: <http://catalogo-gostorico.fondazionemondadori.it/> last accessed on 30th June 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Giardini follows Lloná's frequent departures from Fitzgerald's text too often for this to be a mere coincidence. Moreover, French was far more widely spoken than English, at the time.

<sup>5</sup> This is Cesare Giardini, the translator of *The Great Gatsby*

<sup>6</sup> The person mentioned, A. Gaggiotti dal Pozzo, was in fact the editor of *Lidel*, a fashion magazine for upper class women, that sought to promote Italian fashion over French.

<sup>7</sup> Initially this was Erberto Rilke, the Director of Mondadori's International Bookstore; later his place was taken over by Romualdo Martelli, the person in charge of all railway bookshops and newsstands "throughout the Kingdom".

will be pleased to offer books to the value of 100 lire to whoever contacts us once the recommended title is published<sup>8</sup>.

Before going to the Archive, I had initially procured a pdf file of the volume from the National Library in Florence<sup>9</sup>. From this, the book appeared to be the size of a modern paperback, but on viewing the hard copy at the *Fondazione*, the full impact of the magazine-like style was revealed: all *Palma* books had a large 18-by-25-centimeter format. Read as a paratextual element, this very format would add to the readership's expectations as to the content, which is more likely to be seen as light entertainment to read on the tram and discard after use, rather than as highbrow literature to be treasured as something of value.

A further paratextual element mentioned in the Mondadori introduction to the *Palma* series is the use of coloured markers to signal which novels might be more 'racy' than others and should therefore not be available to all readers: to my knowledge there are no published sources that mention the colour of the dot on the spine of *The Great Gatsby*. The pdf file from Florence shed no light on the matter: the library catalogue number has been stuck on the spine precisely where the marker appears. In the Archive, however, on a very fragile copy of the novel, the marker was revealed as red: Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* may have passed the censors and been published but it was still considered unsuitable for all readers.

The physical format of the volume is symptomatic of the cultural background against which the novel was commercialized: Fitzgerald, like most American authors, was almost totally unknown to the general public in Italy at the time—the lack of prominence of his name on the cover is an indication of this. Further proof of the “lowly” status of the author at the time is the fact that, as mentioned earlier, this first Italian translation is produced through a French “bridge” and not from Fitzgerald's original words. The long shadow cast by the political and ideological climate is apparent in other features: the date on the cover of the volume is indicated according to the year within the so-called Fascist Era and, therefore, *Anno XIV* (year fourteen), while the typeface used for the title and the author's name on the cover is the typical “stripped classicism” Roman-style lettering favored by the regime across public buildings and propaganda materials.

Although it might seem surprising that the authorities allowed the translation and publication of literature from the United States, representing what was ultimately viewed by both the regime and the Catholic church as decadent lifestyles, it was not

<sup>8</sup> This is taken from the 4<sup>th</sup> *Palma* novel, *Elena Willfüer, Studentessa in Chimica* by Vicky Baum, August 1932.

<sup>9</sup> A search of the national SBN OPAC library catalogue, produces only three results for the volume across the whole of Italy, including the copy at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence.



until later in 1936 that the “Ministry for Press and Propaganda” began intervening with any force against foreign works, and before the now re-named “Ministry for Popular Culture” finally turned the screws in 1938 with a more systematic approach.

## The Archive as a record of the political climate

From the reader’s reports, to the physical format of the Series and the novels selected for inclusion with all their paratextual elements, the material in the Archive provides a multi-faceted picture of the complex politics of cultural production during the Fascist period. This ambivalent relationship between the publishing company and the Fascist authorities is something that is fascinating to follow through the copious amounts of correspondence between the two ‘sides’, with the Archive and its ‘unselective’ nature coming into its own. The fluctuating rapport over the years can be illustrated with two very different letters written by Arnaldo Mondadori to Nazareno Padellaro, the then government official responsible for school publications. The first letter is dated “Milan, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1930” and is very strongly worded: Mondadori is complaining that although the school year has already begun, the Ministry has still not sent any advance notice of the school syllabus as promised, so as to allow the publishing company time to prepare the printing of school textbooks:

Dear Friend, you must not forget the substantial, and at present onerous, financial effort made on our part to satisfy you, with the conviction that you would have immediately repaid our act of deference and friendship.

I am certain that you will want to rectify my most pessimistic impression and it is with great impatience that I await your news which I trust will be precise and definitive.

The balance of power has clearly shifted over the intervening seven years, by 15<sup>th</sup> November 1937 (a year after the publication of *Gatsby*), when Mondadori writes to Padellaro again. Having written to him several times asking for money owed by the government to the publishing company for printing school books, Mondadori, in a most compliant—almost groveling—tone, writes off the debt:

Dear and Illustrious Friend,

Your unpaid balance with our Company is reduced as of today, from the original fifty thousand, to one single symbolic lira.

This lira will serve as a reminder of our close and cordial relationship and the constant affectionate mutual cooperation that continues and is further strengthened with each passing day.

Please accept, Dear Friend, my deepest respect and heartfelt affection,

Yours,



Against this background—reading the tension between the lines of this and many other documents relative to the period— it appears all the more remarkable that Mondadori ever published Fitzgerald’s novel.

### The second Italian translation of *The Great Gatsby*

As stated above, because it appeared as a periodical publication for purchase at news kiosks or railway stations, never to be reprinted, Giardini’s 1936 translation of the *Gatsby* had no longevity. Apart from a very small number of copies that found their way into public libraries, it left virtually no trace, so much so that, nine years later, in 1945, Fernanda Pivano, an Italian writer, journalist and translator—who was to become known for introducing and popularizing American literature in Italy after the Second World War—believes that, in Fitzgerald, she has come across a new author to introduce to the Italian public.

In a letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1945 to Alberto Mondadori—who has by now taken over many of his father’s duties within the publishing company—she includes *The Gatsby* in a list of books that she recommends for translation and publication in Italy. Prior to this letter, it is interesting to follow the evolution of the professional relationship between Fernanda Pivano and Alberto Mondadori through their correspondence: they begin by addressing each other respectively as ‘Caro Mondadori’ and ‘Gentile Signora’, moving on to ‘Caro Signor Alberto’ and ‘Cara Signorina’, before arriving at a more relaxed ‘Caro Boss’ and ‘Cara Nanda’: the tone of letters themselves are also indicative of the trust Mondadori placed in Pivano’s recommendations and her skill in forging relationships with authors such as Hemingway, on behalf of the publishing company.

From Pivano’s first letter on the subject, through the Archive, we can follow the repercussions of her advice over time: three years were to pass before Mondadori acted on her recommendation. Evidently oblivious to the publishing company’s prior edition of *Gatsby*, finally, on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1948, he writes, in imperfect English, to Robert Knittel, a literary agent in New York, asking him to acquire the copyright for Fitzgerald’s novel: “I beg you very much to get us the rights for *The Great Gadsby*”<sup>10</sup>.

Two weeks later, on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1948, Knittel replies explaining that, after some investigation, it transpires that Mondadori already holds the rights for *Gatsby* having bought them up in June 1936.<sup>11</sup> One of the elements that stands out in this letter written by Knittel—a native speaker of English and professional literary agent— is the fact that the title is misspelt five times as *Gadsby*, an indication that, even in New York, the novel was yet to reach the classic status it later enjoyed. Following this revelation, Mondadori im-

<sup>10</sup> The misspelt title is corrected by hand on the typed letter.

<sup>11</sup> Giardini’s translation was published in August 1936, so only two months after Mondadori had acquired the rights.

mediately writes to Pivano— on 29<sup>th</sup> November— exclaiming his surprise: “Dear Nanda, you’ll never guess what, but we already published *The Great Gatsby* as one of the *Romanzi della Palma* in 1936! As you can see, my predecessor had ‘a good eye’ for American literature”. He had presumably found a copy of this first translation as he adds that “At a first glance, the book appears to have been cut, summarized and butchered.” He therefore sends Pivano a copy of Giardini’s translation and asks for her assessment.

Five months later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1949, there is an exchange in which Pivano communicates her belief that the original translation can be salvaged with a few minor changes. Mondadori replies asking whether Pivano would be amenable to making the changes herself. Receiving no reply on the subject, he writes again, repeating the question. By 2<sup>nd</sup> May, Pivano has clearly examined the translation more attentively and she finally sends her report on Giardini’s version: she finds the translation passable, without any great omissions or misunderstandings. She is, however, critical of the “general tone”, which she feels does not do justice to the novel. After listing a series of examples of what she classes as unacceptable travesties of Fitzgerald’s “most delicate style”, she comes to the conclusion that “I admire Fitzgerald too much not to recommend translating this book again. It’s a question of tone and respect for the most important figure of the jazz age.” And so it came to be that Pivano took on the task of retranslating *The Great Gatsby* herself, ultimately published by Mondadori in 1950.

This time, the translation was published in the prestigious *Medusa* series—inaugurated in 1933 and described as representing *The Great Narrators of All Countries*. The inclusion in this series—with a classical reference in its title, a higher price point and sober, highbrow book covers—helped confer increased status on Fitzgerald as a writer and, by extension, on American literature in general. Ever since its first appearance as a *Medusa* volume in 1950, Pivano’s translation has been continuously in print, with Mondadori producing a number of different editions, for placement within a variety of collections—notably, the *Oscar* series, Italy’s most famous affordable paperback editions. Again, the Archive provides useful information on the commercial aspects of production. The table below summarises the sales for Pivano’s translation, outlining the increasing print runs over the first three versions published—the highbrow *Medusa*, the mid-point *Bosco* and the more popular *Oscar*:

**Table 1.** Sales data for three Mondadori versions of *The Great Gatsby* – dated 29/1/74.

Collection	Price	Editions	Total print run	Total sales	Last edition	Copies	Copies sold
Bosco 31	800	4	24,088	24,038	April 1964	7,995	7,945
Medusa 255	450	1	9,979	9,979	Aug. 1950	9,979	9,979
Oscar 35	750	4	177,055	176,774	April 1972	15,104	14,823

There are now fifteen Italian translations of *The Great Gatsby*—all but one published since 2010 when the copyright for Fitzgerald’s works moved into the public domain in Europe—but Mondadori continue to publish Pivano’s translation, albeit in a slightly revised version (Wardle 2018).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, the variegated material to be found in archives—the hard copy published translations, examples of other novels from the same series, reader’s reports, correspondence, sales data, contracts—can serve to illustrate the precarious balancing act behind the publication of any given (re)translation. In this specific case, research carried out in the *Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori* provides valuable information on the cultural, commercial and political tension implicit in publishing translated literature in Italy during the first half of the twentieth century. As well as providing some answers as far as these two individual translations of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* are concerned, the archival research also raises further questions to be investigated in future research: are these two cases representative within the Mondadori company? Do other publishing companies behave in the same way? Are translations dealt with differently in Italy compared to other countries? Whatever our area of interest—the choice of texts to translate, the translation process itself, the figure of the translator, the quality control of translations, editorial norms, paratextual elements, competition with other companies, questions of copyright, the time constraints imposed on the whole process—the archives can provide an insight.

Ultimately, by investigating behind the scenes, as it were, and bringing to the fore material that has frequently been left to gather dust, we can contribute to lifting the cloak of invisibility that still all too often shrouds translators and their work. The archive can allow us to see all the threads that went into producing the translation, woven together, within their original fabric rather than as single, isolated strands. It is then up to us to suggest questions, test hypotheses and draw conclusions from this information. As Michelle T. King puts it: “We go to the archives not to find answers, but articulate a better set of questions. Answers in the archives – in the form of documents – always abound; the real difficulty lies in figuring out what questions to ask them” (2012: 20).

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