

# Textus

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## THE ARCHIVAL TURN IN MODERN LITERATURE

edited by Daniela Caselli and Caroline Patey

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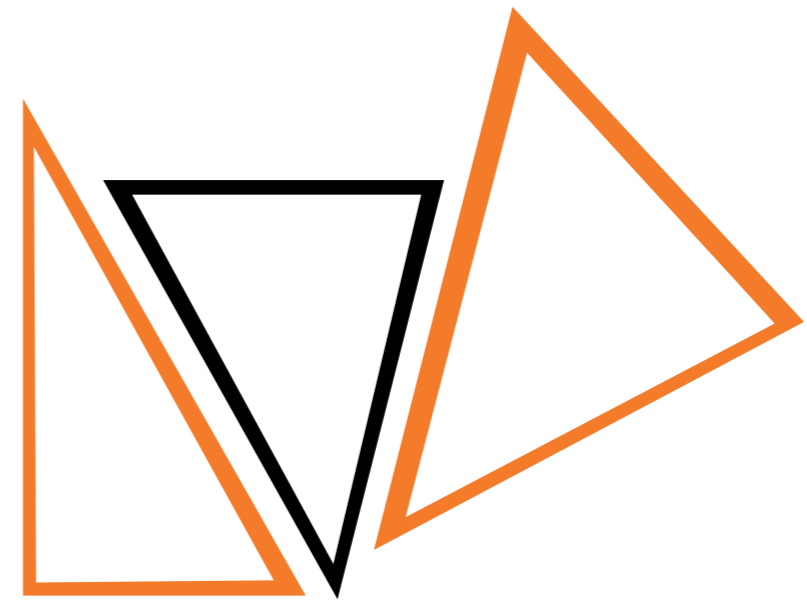
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# “Italy means most to me”: Richard Aldington, Politics, and Translation in Two Italian Archives\*

*Elisa Bolchi*

## *Abstract*

Poet, critic, translator, biographer, co-founder of Imagism with Ezra Pound and bestseller novelist in his own time, Richard Aldington has been “much neglected in recent years” (Whelpton 2014). Yet, fifty years after his death, he is receiving new recognition, as the re-issue of *Death of a Hero* in the Penguin Classics (2013) and a new biography (2014) prove.

A survey of the documents held at Scalero’s Archive and at the Historical Archive of the Arnoldo Mondadori Press reveals some of Aldington’s considerations about his poetics and about the Italian translations of his works. The letters that Aldington wrote to his translator Alessandra Scalero confirm the novelist’s commitment to his political ideals. Indeed, when asked to declare in a letter to Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Minister of press and propaganda, that his novel *Death of a Hero* had no “bad intentions”, in order to overcome Italian censorship, he could not accept “to write anything which might make the book seem other than it is”, and as he would not “ask a favour of anyone, even of Italy!” the novel translation was postponed until 1956.

The archives also reveal Aldington’s care for his Italian translations, that he considered “so good and accurate compared with the French and German” ones (even though he was very precise in pointing out any translation mistakes to his publisher), as well as his deep love for Italy. The British artist who choose France for his self-exile actually thought that his writing seemed “so much better in Italian than in French” and confessed that “Italy, Italian culture and Italian life have been one of the most important and certainly happiest influences in my life”.

*Keywords:* Richard Aldington, literary transfer, Italy, censorship.

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\* Permission to publish these letters and documents was granted by their respective owners, as pertaining to them: the Archivio Scalero, at the civic library of Mazzé, Turin, and the Archivio Storico Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, at Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, Milan. Excerpts from a number of Richard Aldington’s letters to Alessandra Scalero are reproduced by kind permission of the Estate of Richard Aldington c/o Rosica Colin Limited, London.

The English writer and poet Richard Aldington has been “much neglected in recent years” (Whelpton 2014: 11), both in his home country and in Italy. In the latter country, however, he is starting to enjoy the attention he deserves thanks to the discovery of a number of unpublished documents kept in two Italian archives, namely the Scalero Archive, held at the public library of Mazzé, Turin, and the Arnaldo Mondadori Editore Historical Archive, held at Mondadori Foundation in Milan.

In introducing him to the Italian public in the pages of *La Nuova Antologia* in 1931, Carlo Linati presented Aldington as someone whose name should not sound new to a “mediocre connoisseur of contemporary English literature” [mediocre conoscitore di letteratura inglese contemporanea] (Linati 1932: 141). When Linati wrote these lines Aldington was about to become a best-selling novelist. He was already well known as a poet, a co-founder of imagism, the editor of influential literary periodicals such as *The Egoist* and *The Criterion*, a translator from French and Italian, and, of course, a novelist. His *Death of a Hero*, “generally regarded as one of the best of the fictional treatments of the Great War” (Copp 2002: 15), and described by George Orwell as “much the best of the English war books” (Whelpton 2014: 12), was defined by Linati as “one of the most blunt, daring and interesting novels that England has seen in the last years” [uno dei più schietti, arditi e interessanti romanzi che l’Inghilterra vide in questi ultimi tempi] (142). It is no doubt blunt and daring because Aldington himself had become blunt and daring after experiencing the front, although he had never been an easily tamed spirit: “Aldington started to take control of his own story when he rejected the most obvious route open to a literate young man without money or qualifications: a post as a clerk in the City” (Whelpton 2014: 23). It was thanks to such a decision, and to his sociability, that the sports editor of a London daily offered him “free lodging in his flat in Bloomsbury and the opportunity to report on sporting events two or three afternoons a week”. This job gave him “freedom, time to write poetry, a slender income – and did not, he felt, constitute selling his soul” (Whelpton 2014: 24). His extreme intellectual honesty is, though, a possible cause for his neglect in recent years, especially after the publication of his controversial biography of Lawrence of Arabia, where he presented a British hero as an “impudent mythomaniac” causing an “unprecedented

furor” followed by “the gradual disappearance of his work from bookshops and publishers’ lists of reprints” (Copp 2002: 26-27). As Copp affirms, his “stubborn and unwavering integrity throughout these final and problematic years has to be admired” (27), even though this controversy caused personal and financial problems for Aldington, and “the loss of a moving and important voice from the canon of British war writing” (27) for modern readers.

In light of recent studies underlying the importance of archives, it has become almost unthinkable to start research work on a twentieth-century writer without taking into account his relationship with his publisher (Sironi 1998: 131). An analysis of the mainly unpublished documents kept in two Italian archives is thus helpful in giving Aldington the critical attention that such an artist deserves. If Aldington’s letters to his first Italian translator, Alessandra Scalero, are interesting for their private perspective, the documents of the Arnoldo Mondadori Editore Historical Archive are useful for their editorial perspective. Recent works have revealed the tremendous value of publishing house documents in tracing the political and cultural history of a country (Procaccia 2011: 226) because, according to Ulrich Raulff, they are

evidently helpful if one wishes to follow an author’s relation to the literary public and to economic reality. [...] Such archives reveal the negotiations that have taken place between the process of literary writing on the one hand [...] and the processes of circulation and the social uses of literature on the other. (Raulff 2011: 163)

As we shall see, the obstacles caused by censorship to the publication of Aldington’s works, as well as his reactions and solutions proposed, are a good example of the complications that such negotiations implied.

### **“The best I have to give”: A Private Confession of Aldington’s Poetics**

Aldington’s independent spirit is immediately evident in his correspondence with Scalero, a prominent translator who had already translated into Italian the works of important contemporary authors, including Virginia Woolf, and who had been offered, as

she wrote to her sister Liliana (22.11.1933), a “fixed and very good monthly salary” [uno stipendio mensile fisso e molto vantaggioso] by Mondadori to work exclusively for them.

In the first letter Aldington wrote to Scalerò, he expressed how glad he was to know that the translation of his book was “in such competent hands” (16.7.1933). We can surmise that Scalerò had asked Aldington to provide her with some information about his life, and he tells her of how he had left home when he was eighteen because of a serious disagreement with his family – who wished him to become a lawyer while he wanted a literary career – and had earned his living ever since. He then explains that he wrote his novel *Death of a Hero* entirely for himself, because he did not believe it would be published, and so was immensely surprised when it was immediately accepted in London and New York. He also gives reasons for his self-exile in France:

I left England chiefly because I could not stand the atmosphere of stagnation and the attitude and because I greatly disliked the wave of sterile intellectualism which swept over our literature. I believed in the senses and the emotions in art, and was mocked at in consequence. So that I felt and indeed was an outcast and an exile. Yet I knew I had something to say and believed in it. (16.7.1933)

The motives for his expatriation were not dissimilar to those of a much more famous self-exiled writer: Joyce called it *hemiplegia*, Aldington *stagnation*, but the idea is the same, namely, a dissatisfaction towards the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of their own country. Aldington also tells Scalerò an anecdote about his surprise when he discovered that his book was a success thanks to a man in a café, who had asked him “Do you know all England is talking about your book?” He also confesses to her how, for nearly ten years after the war, he had “found it impossible to do much creative work” because war had made him “incapable of creative writing”:

I had to start all over again, re-educate myself (I forgot my Greek and Italian, and had to re-learn them) and earn a living [...]. Consciously and in part unconsciously during those apparently barren years 1919-28 I was giving myself a prolonged literary discipline. (16.7.1933)

Aldington was indeed a very serious and committed worker. Probably because he always had to earn his living through letters,

he tackled his work in a very disciplined way. Zilboorg reports how "Aldington, always and particularly in times of stress, was a martinet about order and detail" (Zilboorg 2003: 171); thus he explains to Scalero how all the work he had to do to make a living was, in fact, a "valuable discipline" because "I had been unconsciously training myself for prose narrative and at the same time giving discipline to certain prose qualities I scarcely knew I possessed". When he came to write his first novel he was then "already as well-equipped as a writer as it was possible for me to be. I did not need to think at all how I should express what I had to say, but only of what I had to say". When he sat down to write *Death of a Hero*, "it was a spontaneous outpouring of all that had been accumulating in me" (16.7.1933). This is an interesting declaration by a founding member of imagism, which stresses the need to refer "to the manner of presentation, not to the subject" ("Preface", 1916: v).

Among the most interesting aspects of this long letter to Scalero, however, is the manner in which Aldington explains his modernist-inflected poetics, maintaining that

the formative influences in my mental life have been classic, i.e. Greece and Italy and France, not Germany and Russia. So that each of these books implies an effort to give form to the chaos of modern life.

This is a particularly intriguing statement in light of T. S. Eliot's definition of 'mythical method'. Eliot opens his essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth" claiming to have chosen to attack Aldington, who had called Joyce a "great undisciplined talent", on the basis of the fact that they are "more or less agreed as to what we want in principle, and agreed to call it classicism" (Eliot 1975: 176). Thanks to Norman Gates's work, we know that Aldington wrote "The Influence of Mr. James Joyce", an article that appeared in April 1921 in the *English Review*, "following an agreement with Eliot to review *Ulysses* from opposite points of view" (Gates 1992: 50). While Aldington's article is now quite forgotten, the declaration in Eliot's essay about the use of myth as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177) is well known and not so dissimilar from the one expressed by Aldington in his letter to Scalero. Eliot himself claims that the mythical method is a "step toward making the



modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires" (178); but while Eliot tries to give a shape to chaos through myth, Aldington reveals himself to be more interested in the classical forms of Mediterranean literatures, which he knew well for having translated Voltaire, De Bergerac, Boccaccio, Euripides and others.

Unlike the snobbish English intellectuals that Aldington depicts as "mostly sterile and destructive" because "they can only destroy those who can make", he managed to produce what he had wished for: "I know and humbly acknowledge that my books have many faults and weaknesses, but they are something made, they are built out of the best I have to give, which is given freely" (Aldington to Scalero: 16.7.1933). Not only had he *made* something, but he also had clear ideas about his aim: to treat "all the pettiness of life" satirically because, he confessed to Scalero, he believed that "this mingling of satire with tragedy, with pathos and with romance solves the problem of realism in the novel, and that it is my original contribution. Needless to say, nobody who has written about me in England has even caught a glimpse of this" (16.7.1933). That is why he warns her that, as far as the English intelligentsia is concerned, he is still an outcast:

But I will not flatter cliques and literary fashions. I go my own way whether I am read or not. Consequently, you will find English opinion strongly divided: especially those who write "high-brow" literary criticism are against me. But I have a large public in England, the educated people who are outside the literary racket [...]. And I have made my way against the literary cliques, against banning by libraries and all manners of petty persecution and boycotting.

After such a presentation of himself, his decisions about the Italian editions of his novels should have been quite predictable.

### **"The book cannot be other than it is": The Necessity of Truth**

Mondadori's interest in Aldington dates back to 1932, when Augusto Foa, founder of Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale, asked the agent James B. Pinker for a list of Aldington's novels and short stories, because they were interested in buying the rights to his works. Once they received the list, the Mondadori Publishing House declared

they were prepared to sign an agreement for Aldington's works "buying at the signature of the Agreement the novel DEATH OF A HERO [...] in the same line as of Mr. Aldous Huxley Agreement" (ALI to Pinker: 2.12.1932). Aldington, though, refused the terms proposed by Mondadori, thus demonstrating at once that he had a clear idea of his worth and, at the same time, a certain resistance to compromise.

It was at that moment that a crucial figure in the introduction of British and Irish writers to Italy played an important role. Carlo Linati, who was a friend of Aldington's, as he was of James Joyce, illustrated to Aldington the "special circumstances" of the Italian literary market (ALI to Pinker: 24.12.1932) during a friendly talk and convinced him to accept lower terms. They agreed on *Death of a Hero* to be the first work to be purchased and published, but Foa also requested an option on "all published and to be published works by this Author" (ALI to Pinker: 24.12.1932). A note on this letter also specifies that "payment of the royalty upon DEATH OF A HERO" will be due "at the date of the Italian translation of the work" in order to avoid "the risk that Italian censure do not give their permission to publish the book". The reason for this remark is quite obvious. *Death of a Hero* is a novel strongly condemning war, holding governments responsible for a useless conflict that had destroyed an entire generation, and which closes with the protagonist committing suicide: all unwelcome themes under Fascism<sup>1</sup>. As predicted, Mondadori had difficulty in getting *Death of a Hero* accepted by the censors, and Aldington, aware of the problems that his novel might present, suggested through his agents that Mondadori "begin by publishing ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES [...] and later approach the authorities with a carefully edited translation of DEATH OF A HERO" adding that he was "quite willing to agree to any cuts considered necessary" because he knew "the condition to which the publisher and translator must conform" (ALI to Mondadori: 24.5.1933).

An interesting aspect emerges here. Although willing to accept cuts, as he had already done with the British edition, Aldington could not accept any change to the overall intentions of his book, as

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of translations under the fascist regime see C. Rundle and K. Sturge (2010).

he clearly declared in the “Note from the Author” that opens *Death of a Hero*:

This novel in print differs in some particulars from the same book in manuscript. To my astonishment, my publishers informed me that certain words, phrases, sentences, and even passages, are at present taboo in England. I have recorded nothing which I have not observed in human life, said nothing I do not believe to be true. I had not the slightest intention of appealing to any one’s salacious instincts; if I had wanted to do that, I should have chosen a theme less seriously tragic. But I am bound to accept the opinion of those who are better acquainted with popular feelings than I am. At my request the publishers are removing what they believe would be considered objectionable, and are placing asterisks to show where omissions have been made. If anything “objectionable” remains, the responsibility is, of course, mine. In my opinion it is better for the book to appear mutilated than for me to say what I don’t believe. (Aldington 1929: 19)

The note closes with an emblematic “En attendant mieux”, but this wait for better times was longer than expected. The novel was still to be translated and published in 1934, when Scalero wrote Aldington a letter to hasten him to make a decision. She wrote that she had had long discussed *Death of a Hero* with the Director of Mondadori, underlining that they very much wanted to publish the work, although “Alas: you are certainly aware that in our country such a thing as censorship exists”<sup>2</sup>. Scalero explains that Mondadori had asked her to write to the Minister of Press and Propaganda, Count Galeazzo Ciano, mentioning Aldington’s desire to see *Death of a Hero* translated into Italian after *All Men Are Enemies*. Scalero therefore makes a precise request:

You should send me a “diplomatic” letter, that I could send in turn to Mr. Ciano. Then I’ll see what I can do: your letter should make him understand that your book has no ... bad intentions – you’ll surely know how to explain such things<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> “hélas: vous n’ignorez sans doute point qu’il existe dans notre pays quelque chose comme une censure”. Translation mine. Scalero writes in French because she says she is in haste and fears that her English will not give Aldington “une idée très vaillante de mes facultés de traductrice” [a really good idea of my translating abilities]. (Scalero to Aldington: not dated)

<sup>3</sup> “Il faudrait donc me faire parvenir une lettre «diplomatique», que je puisse

Unwilling to betraying his integrity and his allegiance to the truth, Aldington answered Scalero saying that her suggestions about *Death of a Hero* had put him in difficulty:

On the one hand, I am far from desiring to wish to urge the Italian authorities. On the other hand, it seems unfair (peu loyale [sic]) to write anything which might make the book seem other than it is. After all, it is an Englishman's book written for England; and if Italy does not want it... well, there it is. The book cannot be other than it is. Twenty-two years have passed since my boyhood; so I need not say how happy I am that anything I write should be translated into Italian. But I will not ask a favour of anyone, even of Italy! I have risked prosecution and imprisonment in England by saying what I believed to be true; and I am too old to change. So perhaps it is best for you to forget that a book called *Death of a Hero* exists. (4.10.1934)

If cuts were an option, writing anything “which might make the book seem other than it is” was not. The archive thus proves that what he had declared in his “Note” was true: he preferred to see the book “mutilated” than to say what he did not believe. He then waited for better times, which eventually came well after the Second World War, in 1956, when *Death of a Hero* was published by Mondadori (translated by Cesare Vivante).

His answer introduces another interesting aspect: Aldington's admiration and love for Italy. This would emerge from many other letters, such as when he wrote to Mondadori to show his enthusiasm for the fifth impression of *Le Donne Devono Lavorare*, the Italian translation of *Women Must Work*, saying “I wish I could tell you what pleasure it gives me to know that this book is still being read in Italy” (8.11.1950). Seven days later he wrote again, confirming he was “proud indeed” that a book of his had had five impressions, “for Italy, Italian culture and Italian life have been one of the most important and certainly happiest influences in my life”. He went as far as to add:

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communiquer, à mon tour, a Mr. Ciano. Je verrais ensuite ce que je peux faire: il faudrait que votre lettre lui fasse comprendre que votre livre ne récale point de... mauvaises intention – enfin, vous avez sans doute de ressources pour expliquer des choses pareilles”. Translation mine. (Scalero to Aldington: not dated)

Indeed, if only some freedom were granted to ordinary Europeans (instead of only to Americans and bureaucrats) I should still gladly spend part of every year in Italy; especially as I hope my daughter will learn to speak Italian and to value Italian art as I do. (15.II.1950)

The Italian reissue of *All Men Are Enemies* in 1954 also delighted Aldington, so much so that he wrote to Mondadori:

The book is dear to me because it contains so many memories of happy days, mostly of youth, spent in Italy. Think! The first Italian town I saw was Firenze – on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1912, a whole life-time away, but I have never forgotten it. I can still see those beautiful marble designs of the Duomo and Campanile in the winter sunlight. Che bellezza! [sic] But who cares for beauty now? (16.II.1954)

He even asked for a copy of the new edition because, he says, “I have kept copies of all my Italian translations. And they are so good and accurate compared with the French and German – the Spanish are quite good”. Receiving copies of a reissue of *Death of a Hero* would be another occasion for Aldington to make some comparisons, as he noted: “It is interesting that my writing always seems so much better in Italian than in French!” (Aldington to Mondadori: 7.3.1957). This is a rather compelling evaluation coming from a writer who was a translator himself, and therefore would have paid ample attention to the ways in which his novels were rendered in a foreign language.

### **“Italy means most to me”: The Importance of Competent Translators**

When Alberto Mondadori sent Aldington a copy of *Tutti gli uomini sono nemici*, his first novel to be translated in Italian and published in the Medusa Series in 1934, he underlined that it was met with great favour by both critics and readers. He also said he hoped that Aldington would find the Italian introduction worthy of his book. The introduction noted that his art was “refined by a deep culture” [raffinata da una cultura profonda], which resulted in a “happy graft of modern forms of the good old English tradition” [felice innesto di forme moderne sulla buona vecchia tradizione inglese] (Aldington 1934). Aldington was indeed satisfied; he wrote to

Scalero to thank and congratulate her for the “charming” and “very felicitous translation”, saying that he enjoyed reading the novel in Italian (4.10.1934).

A friendly relationship soon developed between the writer and his translator. They met during their holidays in Austria and he wrote to her whenever he started a new book, so that she could be the first to have it translated. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1936, for instance, he announced that he was working on a novel called *Very Heaven*: “I don’t know if it will be considered fit for translation into Italian (especially by a girl!) but if you like, I will arrange for you to have an advance set of proofs”. Scalero was, of course, interested, and seven months later Aldington sent her the proofs, claiming, “I fear you will have to make a good many cuts in the Italian translation, supposing it is even possible. I think myself it is one of my best books, but you and Signior [sic] Mondadori will judge if it suits your purposes” (19.9.1936). She answered that she very much liked *Very Heaven*, and so he told her he wished it to be translated into Italian, with the proviso that: “I understand the circumstances and quite agree to your making any omissions you think right. But you will not insert anything, will you?” (22.3.1937).

Mondadori also liked the book, partly thanks to Scalero’s reader report, which affirmed that

in this book he sharpens more than ever his character of a “moralizing” writer à la Voltaire [...]. It is our duty to mention that Aldington does not spare cutting remarks towards political organisms and institutions; he is not, however, a radical, strictly speaking, and in this sense his work, with some adjustments here and there, does not sound dangerous at all<sup>4</sup>. (232)

The novel was thus translated and published in 1938. When Aldington received the copies, he wrote once again to tell Scalero:

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<sup>4</sup> “In questo libro egli accentua più che mai il suo carattere di scrittore ‘moralista’ in senso voltairiano, come già accennammo; non c’è uno dei suoi personaggi che non impersoni un difetto o una virtù – queste, a dir la verità, sono assai rare – e che non abbia i difetti delle proprie virtù, e viceversa. [...] È dovere nostro accennare che Aldington non risparmia frecciate verso organismi e istituzioni politiche; con ciò, egli non è propriamente un radicale, e in questo senso la sua opera, specie apportandovi qua e là qualche ritocco, non ci sembra affatto pericolosa”. Translation mine.

“I think that, as always, you have rendered the text extremely well. I only wish it could have been done without any ‘cuts’” (16.10.1938). But cuts had indeed been necessary before the text could be presented to the Italian public, thanks mainly to the co-presence of strong criticisms of the norms of the old bourgeois generation (a recurring theme in Aldington’s works) and a plethora of liberal ideas – quite unacceptable to the Italian censors. For the same reason, *Seven Against Reeves* had to be turned down by Mondadori, and Aldington commented: “I understand the difficulties. But the book is an anachronism. It presupposes a society civilized enough to laugh at its own fatuities. Cela n’existe plus” (Aldington to Scalero: 16.10.1938). This idea of a civilized society now lost was quite an obsession for Aldington, and returns again and again in his letters and novels.

Translation of Aldington’s works resumed after the armistice, and immediately ran into problems. The writer explicitly asked if it would be Scalero translating *The Colonel’s Daughter* and *The Romance of Casanova*, which Mondadori was about to publish. Aldington evidently did not know that Scalero had died five years before<sup>5</sup>, and Mondadori did not mention her death, but rather reassured him that the two novels had already been translated by Bonetti and Gallone, who were among their best translators (27.9.1949).

In the same year, however, Alberto Mondadori had received a letter from Giovanni Cortese, asking him a “big big favour”:

Charis de Bosis is [...] an excellent translator of the school of Adolfo de Bosis. She has already translated two volumes of Conrad’s short stories from English. [...] Dear Pascarella, who knew English very well, thought she was a great translator. I think Charis de Bosis can suit your needs and I beg you to offer her a translation of one of your many English titles<sup>6</sup>. (10.4.1949)

<sup>5</sup> He had stopped writing to her because it would potentially have been dangerous for her to receive letters from an Englishman during the war.

<sup>6</sup> “Charis de Bosis è [...] una eccellente traduttrice della scuola di Adolfo de Bosis. Ha già tradotto a suo tempo due volumi di novelle di Conrad dall’inglese [...]. Il caro Pascarella che conosceva a fondo l’inglese la reputava una grande traduttrice. Penso che Charis de Bosis possa fare il fatto tuo e ti scongiuro di proporle una traduzione di tuoi numerosi titoli inglesi”. Translation mine.

Alberto Mondadori, always in search for those *rarae aves*, translators from English, hastened to offer de Bosis the translation of Aldington's *The Duke of Wellington*. But this decision would cause some trouble. When the book was published in 1952, and Aldington received his copies, he wrote to Alberto to thank him but also to add some caveats:

At the moment I [...] have not time to read the translation carefully. I have read some passages which seem to run smoothly and idiomatically, but I find some little inaccuracies which seem to bring this work below the standard of excellence I always expect of Casa Mondadori.

Per esempio, si legge alla pagina 53 che Lady Mornington scrisse “il suo pieno complemento d'ufficiali”. Ma, come molte donne del settecento in Irlanda la contessa non sapeva bene scrivere la sua lingua, e infatti a [sic] scritto “complimento” per “complemento”. Il “complemento” della traduzione perde così tutto il sapore della citazione. Alla pagina 26 si legge “la marchesa di Pombal in Portogallo”! Lo so, ho scritto “Marquess” e non “Marquis”, ma “Marquis” è la forma un poco volgare, si chiama sempre “Marchioness” in inglese. Far una donna di un uomo di stato storico tanto conosciuto come il Marchese di Pombal mi pare un poco ridicolo. Alla pagina 237 si legge che “I francesi bruciarono veicoli e bagagli ... per illuminare la ritirata”. Ma ché! L'inglese è “to lighten the retreat”, i.e. per fare più leggero!<sup>7</sup>

I have only read a few pages here and there, and hope that there are not more such slips. But such errors can be very unpleasant in the hands of a hostile and unscrupulous reviewer, as do exist. “Il Sig. Aldington è tanto ignorante che a [sic.] fatto una donna del tanto celebre Marchese di Pombal, che non è la Marchesa di Pompadour di Luigi XV”<sup>8</sup>. Well, too late to do anything. (28.2.1952)

<sup>7</sup> “For example on page 53 we read that Lady Mornington wrote ‘il suo pieno complemento d'ufficiali’. But, like many ladies of the 18th century in Ireland, the countess was not so sure in her writing of the language, and in fact she wrote ‘complimento’ instead of ‘complemento’. The ‘complemento’ of the translation thus loses all the flavour of the original quotation. On page 26 we read ‘la marchesa di Pombal in Portogallo’! I know I wrote ‘Marquess’ and not ‘Marquis’, but ‘Marquis’ is a slightly vulgar form, we always say ‘Marchioness’ in English. To turn a historical man as famous as the Marquess of Pombal into a woman sounds a bit ridiculous to me. On page 237 we read that ‘I francesi bruciarono veicoli e bagagli ... per illuminare la ritirata’ [the French burnt vehicles and baggage ... to enlighten the retreat]. Not at all! The English is ‘to lighten the retreat’, i.e. to make it less heavy!” Translation mine.

<sup>8</sup> “Mr. Aldington is so ignorant to make the famous Marquess of Pombal, who is not the Marquis of Pompadour under Louis XV, into a woman”. Translation mine.



Mondadori was quite surprised and wrote on the letter: “Cantoni. Who did the translation? Check the translation for a potential reissue”. [Cantoni. Chi ha tradotto? Far ricontrollare la traduzione per l’ev. ristampa.] Mondadori then wrote to Aldington to apologise, saying he was “really mortified” to hear that Aldington had found “some inaccuracies in the Italian translation of ‘Wellington’” and that he could “rest assured that when preparing the second edition of the book we shall make a thorough revision of the text in order to eliminate any possible fault there might have remained” (8.3.1952). As a matter of fact only the error concerning the Marquess of Pombal was corrected, while Lady Mornington’s “complement” and the vehicles burnt to “enlighten” the retreat remained both in the Mondadori reissue of 1966 and in the recent Castelvechi edition, published in 2015.

This episode caused Aldington to mistrust the translations, so much so that he insisted in conceding the rights to his biography of Lawrence of Arabia only if they allowed him to see the final proofs of the Italian translation:

I have every confidence in you, and Miss Scalero’s versions of the novels are perfect, but you remember I told you there are mistakes in the “Wellington”. This Lawrence of Arabia book has many technical difficulties – Oxford, British Army, Arabia &c – and though I may not know the exact Italian I could point out where there are mistakes – should there be any. I hope you will get a good translator. (Aldington to Mondadori: 26.03.1955)

Alberto Mondadori tried to reassure him but Aldington insisted:

I know your translation will be good, but there are so many difficult points I should like to see the proofs. My dear and great friend, Roy Campbell, our greatest poet, is reading the Spanish proofs for me. And an English scholar in Germany will control those. But, as you know, Italy means most to me. (Aldington to Mondadori: 8.04.1955)

The subject of the book was very delicate indeed. Aldington had first presented the biography to Mondadori on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1954, anticipating that it was likely to cause an upset “because it is an exposure of the trickery by which Lawrence was foisted on the world as a hero”. A few days later he was writing again saying that:

There has been so much fuss about my Colonel Lawrence book in England – his friends asked Winston Churchill to suppress it! – that I had to leave arrangements for serials and translations to the publishers, Messrs William Collins. I don’t know if they have arranged for Italy. Anyway, I wrote at once to demand to Mr Kershaw to urge that the book should go to you first. (27.II.1954)

Mondadori declared that he was interested in reading the proofs, but in February their agent in London, Miss Andrew, sent an “EXTREMELY URGENT” memo about the book:

I am enclosing a number of reviews of this book and would just like to warn you, before signing the contract with Mr. Aldington, that most likely a libel action will follow the publication of this book. Although Collins have invested no end of money and labour to clear the situation beforehand – everybody knew that a controversy would ensue and I mentioned the whole matter already to you (Mr. Lopez) as far back as February, 1954, and was, under date of 24.2.54, told by Collins that you had declined the book – some trouble is expected, due apparently to the extreme tactlessness of Aldington vis-à-vis Lawrence’s mother. (1.2.1955)

Alberto submitted the text to Roberto Cantini, who decided to accept the book and serialize it in *Epoca*, a weekly magazine by Mondadori. The writer then wrote to Mondadori to express how glad he was that the Italian rights had gone to him, although Aldington’s worries about the translation remained. In May he wrote again: “If your translator has any difficulties or queries, I shall be very happy to answer and to give any help I can” (22.5.1955). Alberto once more reassured him that:

the translation of “Lawrence of Arabia” has been entrusted Dr. Giulio De Angelis, who knows English very well and who also translated “Ulysses” by James Joyce<sup>9</sup>. His Italian version of your “Lawrence of Arabia” will be therefore surely a perfect one. (16.06.1955)

De Angelis was indeed a competent translator, yet the book was never published in Italian. The next book to be translated was *Death*

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<sup>9</sup> Mondadori would publish *Ulysses* only in 1961, but in 1955 de Angelis had already translated parts of the novel and was officially in charge of the translation. For a detailed analysis of the vicissitudes behind this first Italian translation of *Ulysses*, see S. Sullam (2013).

*of a Hero*, about which Aldington was very satisfied, purporting not to know if he was “more surprised or pleased and flattered to find a book of mine included in your collection ‘Il Ponte’, which contains so many authors far more famous and successful than I am. Believe me, I am sensible of the honour, and most grateful to you for this mark of confidence and attention”. He also congratulated the flawless translation and the production that “will make some of my French friends very jealous!” (7.3.1957).

No other book by Aldington would go on to be translated by Mondadori, and yet his relationship with the publisher continued through his life – so much so that when he was invited to the Soviet Union in 1962 to receive a prize, he wrote to Alberto Mondadori to confide in him how incredible an experience it had been, and how he was received almost as a national hero (quite surprising for a writer who had been “very glad” to be attacked by Communists in 1948 (Aldington to Mondadori: 7.7.1948)). In the 1960s the rights of his works passed, together with those of many other writers, to the new publishing house founded and directed by the young Mondadori, Il Saggiatore. However, they never published anything by Aldington, apart from his introduction to D.H. Lawrence’s *Apocalisse*. But by the time this book was published, Aldington had been dead for four years.

### Questions and Answers in the Archives

In the aforementioned reader’s report written by Scalero on *Very Heaven* we read:

Among contemporary writers, Aldington is one whose work starts showing the signs of a peculiar consistency, where every single novel appears as the rational continuation of others, thus forming a kind of “contemporary history” of which every hero, male or female, is a particular type of the modern society. Aldington’s concept of modern society – a main theme in all his novels – might be contested, but is no doubt very interesting and should not be underestimated<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> “Fra gli scrittori d’oggi, Aldington è uno di quelli la cui opera comincia a mostrare i segni d’una compattezza singolare, d’una conseguenza per cui ogni singolo romanzo appare il logico seguito degli altri, formando così una specie di ‘storia contemporanea’ della quale ogni suo eroe, uomo o donna, è un tipo particolare

This consideration is not only symptomatic of the interests intrinsic to Aldington’s work and of its possible interest for contemporary scholars, but also shows how archives offer a great deal of material that might help to rediscover Aldington’s worth.

In attempting to present a theory of the modern archive, Ulrich Raulff writes that

two things are absolutely essential for a successful archive. First, it requires good holdings. Secondly, it requires good users: scholars with brilliant ideas and difficult problems, trained to ask the right questions. (Raulff 2011: 161)

Anyone who has consulted an archive knows that the questions it raises are almost infinite: as soon as we believe we have found an answer, this very answer raises new queries. Mondadori proved several times that he was more interested in possessing the rights than in actually publishing the books, as confirmed by a note written by Alberto in 1945, affirming that “the rights remain and are the only true wealth of a publisher” [i diritti restano e sono l’unica autentica ricchezza dell’editore]; it would thus be interesting to attempt to understand the reason behind each publication of Aldington’s works<sup>11</sup>. Because Aldington engaged with Mondadori under Fascism and remained one of their authors until his death in 1962, a detailed analysis of his translations, as well as of the many editorial choices made by Mondadori, would also be worthwhile. One might also wonder what political and cultural processes were at work (cf. Rundle and Sturge 2010: 4) in the translations of Aldington, or whether – and how – the Italian publication helped him in becoming a bestselling novelist.

Even though these documents may provide answers to only a small number of the questions that the subject of a complex author such as Richard Aldington – and an archive such as the Mondadori

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della società moderna. Il concetto che Aldington ha della società moderna – tema preponderante e protagonista di tutti i suoi romanzi – si potrà confutare, ma è senza dubbio assai interessante e va preso tutt’altro che alla leggera”. Translation mine.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Ferrando has attempted an analysis in this sense. Her article (2014) aims to throw light on some of the dynamics that led to either the publication or refusal of some part of Aldington’s works.

one – might raise, they surely represent both a contribution to the expanding archive of English modernism, and confirm Aldington’s moral integrity and commitment to his political ideals, his “intense passion for the truth” (Crawford 1998: 9). On a more intimate level, these archival documents reveal his reluctance to make changes to his works, all the while demonstrating his love for Italy and the Italian language, as well as the important role they played both in the private life and in the works of what Norman Gates properly called “a true man of letters” (1992: 1).

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