# When *Peanuts* Became *linus* Re-Contextualisation through Translation

## «A bourgeois magazine with a bent for publishing the best comics out there»

In an age where «it is increasingly difficult to define the personality of the cultural products we consume», as they mainly respond to the question «where is the project?»,1 discussing a magazine that clearly had a personality is no marginal point. As we read in the editorial of the first issue of linus (1965-), dated 1<sup>st</sup> April, the name was chosen because Linus van Pelt is a «Peanuts» character full of graphic fantasy, «he paints in the air»,<sup>2</sup> and because it was easy to remember and pronounce, considering the Italian diction (/'linus/). At the same time, the magazine was the outcome of a clear project. Following the distinction between managers and intellectuals made by Shiffrin in «L'Edition sans éditeur»,3 Interdonato affirms that the founders of linus were first of all intellectuals, despite their claim to publish high-quality comics «senza pregiudizi intellettualis-

tici».4 The idea of printing a «Comics and Illustration Magazine», as stated in the subheading, and to present to the Italian audience graphic literature from long-acclaimed as well as new authors (E.C. Segar, Al Capp, George Herriman, Walt Kelly, Guido Crepax, among others) was born from the conversations of Ranieri Carano, Elio Vittorini, Umberto Eco, Vittorio Spinazzola, Bruno and Franco Cavallone, and Oresto Del Buono, who gathered in Giovanni Gandini and Anna Maria Gregorietti's bookshop in via Verdi in Milan to discuss an issue that they considered «molto importante e seria, anche se apparentemente frivola: i fumetti di Charlie Brown».<sup>5</sup> In 1963 Milano Libri had also become a publishing brand, which, after acquiring the rights from the United Features Syndicate, initially printed the «Peanuts» stories in book form - Arriva Charlie Brown! (Charlie Brown Is Coming!, 1963), followed one year later by Povero Charlie Brown! and Il terzo libro di Charlie Brown (Poor Charlie Brown and Charlie Brown's Third Book, 1964).

- 1 Paolo Interdonato: Linus. Storia di una rivoluzione nata per gioco. Milan 2015, p. 11.
- 2 linus 1 (1965), p. 1. See also Eco's description of Linus in Umberto Eco: Apocalittici e integrati. Milan 1964, pp. 270f. «Despite being the epitome of all the neuroses of the technological age, «Linus rivela improvvisamente, a tratti, abilità fantascientifiche e maestrie vertiginose: costruisce giochi di allucinante equilibrio, colpisce a volo un quarto di dollaro con la cocca della copertina schioccata come una frusta («the fastest blanket in the West!>).» Umberto Eco: Apocalypse Postponed, trans. by William Weaver. Bloomington 1994, p. 57: «Linus reveals suddenly, in bursts, fantastic abilities and dazzling skills: he performs feats of amazing equilibrium, he can strike a quarter flung in the air with the edge of his blanket, snapping it like a whip (<the fastest blanket in the West!>)».
- André Shiffrin: L'Édition sans éditeurs. Paris 1999.

4 linus 1 (1965), p. 1: «without intellectual

## Fig. 1 linus N° 1, April 1965. Courtesy of *linus*.

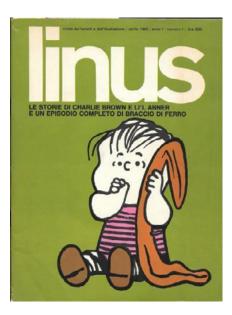
prejudices». (All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.)

- 5 Ibid: «very important and serious, even if apparently frivolous, Charlie Brown comics».
- 6 Cf. «La posta di Charlie Brown». In: linus 4 (1965), pp. 19f.
- 7 Oreste Del Buono: Poco da ridere. Storia privata della satira, dall'Asino a linus. Bari 1976, p. 124. «[...] wasn't in the least concerned with Italian satire».
- 8 Ibid., p. 126. «[...] a bourgeois magazine with a bent for publishing the best comics out there».
- 9 «Referendum I». In: linus 5 (1965), p. 17.

10 Ibid., p. 20.

Despite its distinct personality, however, the magazine did not introduce itself as a personified object but rather as a graphic space. The choice of not capitalizing the name «linus» on the cover page (fig. 1) was probably dictated by a search for graphic neatness, the intention to offer its readers a magazine typographically as flawless and clean as possible.6 But it might also have been inspired by the contemporary skyline of Milan, recently transformed by the appearance of two skyscrapers, the Velasca Tower (1957) and Gio Ponti's Pirelli Tower (1960). In the impeccable Helvetica font of the heading, now a very common typeface but quite a novelty at the time as it had been invented by the Swiss Max Miedinger only eight years before, the  $\oplus$ twinned with the <i>, formed (but for the brief interruption under the square dot) two, almost identical, parallelepiped that soared vertically like the skyscrapers of glass, concrete and steel that had become part of the setting in which the magazine was born. In the 1960s, with its architectural symbols of post-war economic renaissance and the minimalist underground designed by Franco Albini, Milan appeared as the modern city par excellence. It had a thriving cultural life and a booming economy, which also justified the possibility of putting on the market a monthly more than twice as expensive as other comics: 300 against the average 50-150 liras.

In spite of its left-wing collocation, *linus* «non si preoccupava minimamente della satira italiana»<sup>7</sup>, according to one of its founders, Oreste del Buono, and was, admittedly, «un giornalino borghese con



la tendenza a pubblicare i migliori fumetti in circolazione».8 The results of the first survey, titled «Referendum», in issue 5 revealed that most of its readers were high-school or university students, academics, and white-collar workers (clerks and professionals). Only the lowest percentage, 20 out of 1484 respondents, belonged to the category of «artisans»; factory workers were not even contemplated as an option.9 On the same page, we find a satirical vignette (fig. 2) from the series published in the magazine MAD (Issue 97) whose title parodied Charles M. Schulz' famous quote «Happiness is a warm puppy», changing it «with cruel but funny humour», as the comment underlined, to «Being rich is better than a warm puppy».10

In the next years, the «Referendum» was followed by two more surveys that confirmed the social extraction of the magazine's readership. The average «linusiano» or «linusiana» was playfully sketched as a 24-year-old, newly-graduate or soon-to-graduate student who liked wearing velvet jackets, liberty ties, loden coats, English shoes and Rabanne trinkets, a cosmopolite whose favourite cities were London (for men) and Paris (for women), and who sympathised,



Being rich is having someone else put things back where you got them from.

among others, with the two Bobs (Dylan and Kennedy), Pablos (Picasso and Neruda), and Corsos (Gregory and Mariolino<sup>11</sup>).<sup>12</sup> However, in 1968, when *linus* was accused by its readers of not taking their protests seriously enough, this condescending portraiture would provide the material for a sour rejoinder. The editors reminded their readers of Pasolini's indignant verses written after witnessing the fights between the young protesters and the police at Villa Giulia in Rome: with the lens of ideology, the students were on the right side and the police on the wrong side; but from the viewpoint of class struggle, what Pasolini saw were the spoiled children of the bourgeoisie (the students) beating up the sons of the proletariat (the policemen).<sup>13</sup>

Criticism was also targeted to the snobbish attitude of those readers who looked down at mass culture and considered comics a genre for the happy few, treating the newly initiated as *parvenus*.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, some letters expressed mixed feelings towards an editorial product which was clearly perceived as the epitome of mass culture. A reader prophetically wrote that he could foresee the time when «Peanuts» clubs would be founded, with badges and pennants, and Snoopy gadgets produced and given to girlfriends as presents.<sup>15</sup> In *Apocalittici e integrati*, published only one year before the appearance of the magazine, Eco had dedicated a whole chapter to comics as an expression of mass culture. The semiotician admitted that comics were top-down products, not the genuine outcome of popular culture. Yet, as the title of the book suggested, he pioneered a cultural phase in which the apocalyptic view of intellectuals who stigmatised mass culture as immoral and irrevocably decadent would be replaced by critical acceptance and active optimism.

Eco tried to legitimise comics through the recognition of their creative value, which transcended any political and even sociological interpretation. He pointed out that not even Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*, with its merciless portraiture of American province in the imaginary counties of Dogpatch and Slobbovia, could escape the paternalizing gaze of its creator, whether consciously or unconsciously.

E se i fumetti di Al Capp sviluppano, attraverso le avventure di Li'l Abner, una critica dei tic e dei miti americani, talora con indomita cattiveria – penso alla satira di una società opulenta fondata sul consumo, che la

- 11 Mario (Ariolino) Corso was a football player and the coach of FC Internazionale Milano team between 1957 and 1975.
- 12 linus 25 (1967), pp. 24f.
- Pier Paolo Pasolini: Il PCI ai giovani!
  In: L'Espresso 24 (1968). Reprinted in: Nuovi Argomenti 10 (April-June 1968), pp. 17-29. To read the editors' comments, s. footnote 73.
- 14 Vittorio Spinazzola: Noi fumettomani. In: linus 3 (1965), p. 1.
- 15 «La posta di Charlie Brown». In: linus 3 (1965), p. 18.

- 16 Eco: Apocalittici e integrati, p. 264. Trans., p. 51: «And if the famous strips of Al Capp, through the adventures of Li'l Abner, present a criticism of American tics and myths, at times with irrepressible nastiness – for instance, the satire of an opulent society based on consumption, featured for some time in the story of Shmoo – it is also always seen against an indestructible background of optimism and good humour, while the scene of the events, the village of Dogpatch, in its pastoral dimension, regularly dulls the bite of the various attacks on situations originally concrete and troubling».
- 17 Ibid., p. 265.
- 18 Ibid., p. 268.
- 19 Ibid. See also Umberto Eco: Charlie Brown e i fumetti. In: linus 1 (1965), p. 2.
- 20 Bruno Cavallone: Alla scoperta dei Peanuts. In: linus 1 (1965), p. 3.
- 21 Eco: Apocalittici e integrati, p. 266. Trans., p. 52: «the brief daily or weekly story, the traditional strip, even if it narrates an episode that concludes in the space of four panels, will not work if considered separately; rather it acquires flavour only in the continuous and obstinate series, which unfolds strip after strip, day by day».
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Al Capp: How Li'l Abner Became the Intellectuals' Delight. My Life as an Immortal Myth. In: Life 58.17 (30 April, 1965), p. 101.
- 24 linus 1 (1965), p. 2.
- Sabina Fazli: Magazines, Affects, and Atmosphere. In: Jutta Ernst/Oliver Scheiding/Dagmar von Hoff (Eds.): Periodical Studies Today: Multidisciplinary Analyses. Leiden, Boston 2022, pp. 205-229, p. 222. See also Oliver Scheiding: Seriality and Or-

storia dello Schmoo ha così gustosamente protratto per un certo tempo – tuttavia anche questa critica è sempre tenuta su uno sfondo indistruttibile di bonomia e di ottimismo, mentre il teatro degli avvenimenti, la cittadina di Dogpatch, nella sua dimensione «strapaesana» riduce costantemente a livello di saga primitiva il mordente dei vari attacchi e situazioni che in

origine erano concrete e delimitabili.16 Nevertheless, he pointed out, just like any other kind of artists belonging to a cultural and economic system, cartoonists have a degree of autonomy, and it is in that space of intellectual freedom that their art, their genius, can emerge. The artist's mastery of discursive practices allows the creation of something compelling, powerful, crystal-clear, and effective, which supports shared myths and values; stock characters cease to be mechanical puppets and become actual social types; at the same time, the social satire they enact can rise above stereotypes and touch an inner, universal chord.<sup>17</sup> Comics are not just for children's entertainment or a cheap form of evasion from humdrum reality that adults can experience while comfortably sitting in their armchairs after dinner. The experience of reading comics is a spell that breaks the routine of consumption or cheap evasion and verges on meditation.<sup>18</sup> Like a peculiar kind of visual score, comics can attain the condition of music. Interviewed for the first issue of linus, Eco compares «Peanuts» strips to jazz, where the same musical phrase is persistently repeated,19 while the editorial underlines that Schulz's strips are an «uninterrupted poem».20

Significantly, Eco points out that the spell only occurs when this lyrical vein meets seriality and, to exemplify his point, he establishes a connection between the myth of Scheherazade and comics (he refers to George Herriman's «Krazy Kat», but the argument is later applied to the «Peanuts»). Their power lies in memory and stems from the reiteration of the experience: «la breve storia giornaliera o settimanale, la striscia tradizionale, anche se racconta un fatto che si conclude nel giro di quattro vignette, non funziona presa a sé, ma acquista ogni sapore solo nella seguenza continua e testarda che si snoda, striscia dopo striscia, giorno per giorno».<sup>21</sup>

Serialization is thus seen as a «structural fact»22 which, on the one hand, confirms that comics belong to consumeristic culture while, on the other, rescues them from their condition of ephemeral commodities whose short lives coincide with their presence at the newsagents -«only long enough to wrap fish in», it may be added, borrowing an expression that would later be used by Al Capp<sup>23</sup> – and whose fruition lasts the time of sipping a cup of coffee.24 Moreover, unlike newspapers, a monthly entirely dedicated to comics would offer the readers not just a window in a wall of text but a world that they could enter with comforting regularity. As Fazli points out, «monthly or bi-monthly publication cycles provide stable and unrushed rhythms».25

Significantly, Eco's chapter on comics was titled «Charlie Brown's World».<sup>26</sup> And indeed, the idea behind *linus* was that of putting the world into a magazine. Giovanni Gandini once remarked

## 10. CHI È « TIRA-MOLLA »?

Questa domanda celava un « sottile » tra-bocchetto. Si voleva saggiare il grado di « condizionamento » dei nostri lettori. Ma, solo 72 banno risposto « Charlie Broun », mentre oltre mille banno fatto riferimen-to, in qualche modo, all'amico di Cucciolo. Supponiamo, tuttavia, che molti lettori ab-biano giustamente ostervato che Charlie biano giustamente osservato che Charlie Brown è, per l'esattezza, « Tira-e-Molla ».

### \*

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3

2

## 11. COS'È IL PIPER?

un aereo uno champagne un locale da ballo un ballo suonatore di cornamusa un animaletto un uccello una pianta rampicante rivista americana riformatorio personaggio dell'Intrepido un missile carne in scatola un pesce cleodotto



## 12. LA TELEVISIONE

Le rubriche TV preferite sono « Almanac-co» e « TV7», seguite dai vari cicli di film (molto apprezzati quelli di Alec Guinness), Anche Carosello ha i suoi « aficionados », ma, tutto sommato, non ha risposto a que-sta domanda più del 30 % dei lettori.

## Notizie varie

Il numero 97 di « MAD » dedica una serie di vignette a Schulz, sugge-rendo all'autore dei "Peanuts" un nuovo tema per pubblicazioni del tipo « La felicità è un cucciolo caldo ». Il titolo « Being rich is better than a warm puppy \* è tipico dello spietato, anche se molto diverten-te, umorismo di \* MAD \*.



Being rich is having someone else things back where you got them f





## Fig. 3 linus Nº 1, April 1965, pp. 18f.

der. In: Jutta Ernst / Oliver Scheiding / Dagmar von Hoff (Eds.): Periodical Studies Today: Multidisciplinary Analyses. Leiden, Boston 2022, pp. 27-28.

- 26 Eco: Apocalittici e integrati, pp. 264-272. Trans. pp. 50-58.
- 27 Interdonato: Linus, pp. 14f.
- 28 Giovanni Battista Zorzoli: Fantascienza minorenne. In: linus 2 (1965), pp. 1f.
- 29 linus 9 (1965), p. 25.
- 30 Antonio Rubino: Storia dei fumetti. In: linus 1 (1965), p. 57. «[I]n the translation process from the original American version to the Italian one, the comics had been maimed, deprived of the distinct trait that represented their novelty».
- 31 Italo Calvino: Six Memos for the Next Millennium. Cambridge 1988, p. 114.
- 32 Gianni Bono / Leonardo Gori / Cristiano Zacchino: Il regime dell'avventura. L'industria degli albi e i venti di guerra. In: Gianni Bono / Matteo Stefanelli (Eds.): Fumetto! 150 anni di storie italiane. Milan 2016, pp. 74-88, p. 74; see also Dario Boemia: Captions and the Narrator's Voice in Italian Comics: Homodiegetic and Autodiegetic Narration in Zerocalcare's Forget my Name. In: Donella Antelmi / Mara Logaldo (Eds.): Testi brevi di accompagnamento. Linguistica, semiotica, traduzione. Mantova 2019, pp. 227-230, p. 227.



that he would never «forget the pleasure of having a magazine and the possibility of saying everything in it».<sup>27</sup> In contrast with the minimalist design of the cover page, the magazine pages were crammed not only with closely juxtaposed comics but also with drawings, editorials, readers' letters in the Charlie Brown's mail page, surveys, announcements of cultural events, games, fans' ads, reviews, an encyclopaedia, and a history of comics (fig. 3).

However, the ambition of a self-contained magazine would soon become problematic. The abundance and variety of contents gave *linus* a centrifugal force which could only be managed by the issue of supplements. In June 1965 the editors had to announce the first one, which would actually be published in October (fig. 4), followed by many others in the long history of the magazine.

# Ideology Between Captions and Balloons

Although the editors expressed appreciation for science-fiction strips like *Jeff Hawke* and *Flash Gordon*<sup>28</sup> and presented

Fig. 4 Supplemento al numero 7 di linus, October 1965.

retrospective views on early Peanuts, their project was neither utopian nor archaeological, but aimed at stressing the comics' capacity to reflect the present time. In the December issue of linus, summing up the first year of the magazine, they defined themselves as «the Lombard philologists».29 Historical and philological rigour served to justify a genre starting from its long tradition, thus highlighting the asynchronies between the appearance of comic strips in American newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century and full affirmation in the first decades of the twentieth, and their reluctant acceptance by the Italian publishing world. In an article on cartoonist Antonio Rubino, Rino Albertarelli reported that, in 1908, while comics were thriving in America, Il Corriere dei Piccoli published «fumetti senza fumetti» (comics without balloons):<sup>30</sup> The reason was allegedly a pedagogic one: the speech bubbles were blamed for discouraging children from reading the texts. For this reason, they had been replaced by captions containing two rhyming couplets that were supposed to illustrate the story, although, as Italo Calvino observed in Six Memos for the Next Millennium (1988), «the advantage gained was minimal: the silly rhyming couplets provided no useful information».31

In 1932, foreseeing the possibility of exploiting the power comics had on the younger generations, the regime allowed a combination of captions and balloons in the magazine *Jumbo* (1932-1938),<sup>32</sup> with the overt aim to foster fascist ideology through the exaltation of nationalism and the civil virtues, as the editorial in issue 1 shows.

Le storielle, che verranno stampate su JUMBO, in nitide ed artistiche illustrazioni, avranno sempre un fine altamente morale: saranno una esaltazione delle virtù civili che ogni bimbo italiano deve avere o prepararsi ad avere nell'esempio fulgidissimo del Re Vittorioso, e sotto la guida del Duce, che tanta parte delle sue cure dedica alla nuova gioventù della Patria. I racconti comici ed umoristici faranno certamente ridere, ma non disgiungeranno mai dalla comicità il dovere dell'insegnamento.<sup>33</sup>

In the post-war years, comics with balloons were published in Il Politecnico (first a weekly then a monthly or irregularly issued), the broadsheet of culture and politics founded and directed by Elio Vittorini, the writer who had brought the best literature of democratic America into the heart of Fascism-stricken Italy with the Americana anthology.34 Founded in Milan in 1945, the periodical gave great importance to the visual arts, especially those embodying new narrative forms and languages. However, in the early 1950s, comics were still at the centre of a heated political debate. In a famous article published in La Rinascita, Communist MP Nilde Jotti anathemised them as the offspring of American ideology, originally introduced in newspapers by Hearst, «imperialista cinico e fascista», with the immoral purpose of bending the pliable minds of children by replacing the logic of argumentation with sheer pictures.35 To understand how seriously this political line was taken, it will suffice to report that another left-wing magazine, Il Pioniere (1950-1962), would start publishing comics with side captions instead of speech bubbles, in an awkward attempt to avoid the prioritization of illustrations over the logocentrism praised by the Communist Party.36 There were of course some discordant voices, namely those of Elio Vittorini and Gianni Rodari, who wholeheartedly defended comics from political allegations. Eventually, in 1961 also Corriere dei Piccoli would start publishing comics with balloons and, in the same years, many other comics magazines for children and teenagers would appear and become extremely popular and long-lived, for example Sergio Bonelli's Zagor (1961-).

Yet when *linus* was founded, comics remained a controversial genre. Criticism about comics strips as the offspring of American imperialism occasionally resurfaced in Charlie Brown's mail column even before becoming more articulately voiced in relation to contemporary political events. The ideological issue was inextricably intertwined with the aesthetic one. As we can read in an editorial in issue 5,

il genere «cartoon» resta in Italia un fenomeno piuttosto trascurato. [...] Tutto il contrario di quel che accade in Inghilterra, negli Stati Uniti, in Francia, dove (a parte la grande tradizione giornalistica della satira illustrata, soprattutto politica), prosperano riviste quasi interamente affidate alla bontà, allo stile e allo spirito dei «cartoons» che pubblicano. Si pensi al famoso «New Yorker», l'autentica, grande accademia del «cartoon», al «Saturday Evening

- 33 Jumbo 1 (1932), p. 1. «The stories that will be printed in JUMBO, in neat artistic illustrations, will always have a highly moral purpose: they will exalt the civil virtues that every Italian child must have or prepare to have following the brilliant example of the Victorious King, and under the guidance of the Duce, who devotes so much of his care to the new youth of our homeland. Comic and humorous stories will certainly make you laugh, but they will never separate the duty of teaching from comedy».
- 34 Elio Vittorini: Americana. Milan 1941.
- 35 Nilde Jotti: La questione dei fumetti. In: La Rinascita 8.12 (1951), p. 35. «[c]ynical, fascist, imperialist Hearst». La Rinascita (1944-1962) was a monthly devoted to politics and culture founded by the leader of the Communist Party Palmiro Togliatti.
- 36 Silvia Franchini: Diventare grandi con il Pioniere, 1950-1962: politica, progetti di vita e identità di genere nella piccola posta di un giornalino di sinistra. Florence 2006.

- 37 Il «Cartoon». In: linus 5 (1965), pp. 1f. «[...] ‹cartoons› remain a rather neglected genre in Italy. [...] Quite the opposite of what happens in England, the United States, France, where (besides the great journalistic tradition of illustrated satire, above all political satire), magazines thrive almost entirely on the quality, style, and spirit of the ‹cartoons› they publish. Think of the famous ‹New Yorker›, the authentic great academy of ‹cartoons›, the ‹Saturday Evening Post›, ‹Esquire›, ‹Punch›, ‹Playboy›, ‹Lui›.»
- 38 Cf. Noël Arnaud / Francis Lacassin / Jean Portel (Eds.). Entretiens sur la paralittérature. Actes du Colloque de Cerisy de 1967 sur la Paralittérature. Paris 1970.
- 39 Ranieri Carano: Un Nobel per Al Capp. In: linus 2 (1965), pp. 53f.
- 40 Spinazzola: Noi fumettomani, pp. 1f.
- 41 Cf. Cristiano Zacchino: Alle sorgenti del Salone del fumetto. Archivi 02.12.2015, https://www.guidafumettoitaliano.com/archivi/alle-sorgenti-del-salone-del-fumetto. «Comics are a serious matter. Outstanding sociologists claim that reading comics is no sign of childishness. Even UNESCO has acknowledged the importance and urgency of making them the object of scientific research».
- 42 Al Capp: How Li'l Abner Became the Intellectuals' Delight. My Life as an Immortal Myth. In: Life 58.17 (30 April, 1965), pp. 97-104.
- 43 Al Capp: How Li'l Abner Became the Intellectuals' Delight. My Life as an Immortal Myth. In: Life International 38.11 (1965), pp. 57-62.

Post», a «Esquire», a «Punch», a «Playboy», a «Lui».<sup>37</sup>

The appraisal of comics, and their publication in a high-quality magazine addressed not only to children but also to adults, was therefore a cultural revolution. Linus was the first magazine to acknowledge the literary value of quality strips, at a time in which the debate about whether comics were to be considered as paralittérature was very much alive in Europe.38 It also introduced outstanding Italian cartoonists such as Guido Crepax («Neutron» was published from issue 2, see fig. 5) and Enzo Lunari, while Hugo Pratt's «Corto Maltese», first published in the magazine Sgt. Kirk (1967-1978) would appear in *linus* only in 1974.

Linus was one of the first magazines to report the names of the cartoonists, thus acknowledging that authorship was inseparable from the legitimisation of comics as a genre. On the other hand, the debate about whether comics and literature had equal status was still an open one. In the second issue, Carano reported that Al Capp had been compared by John Steinbeck to Sterne, Cervantes and Rabelais and considered worth of the Nobel Prize.<sup>39</sup> Following up the discussion, in an editorial in issue 3, Spinazzola painstakingly gauged comics against the value of the greatest novels and novelists, arguing that some strips were one step below Defoe's and Svevo's novels, though slightly superior to Salinger's Catcher in the Rye; «Li'l Abner» was great but could certainly not equal the works by Sartre and Brecht.40

Although Spinazzola warned readers not to corrupt the innocence of comics through an excess of intellectualism, in the 1960s the interest in the genre mainly came from the academic world. In 1964 pedagogue and anthropologist Romano Calisi founded the first club devoted to comics. Between February and March 1965, less than two months before the appearance of linus, the first «Salone internazionale dei fumetti» was held in Bordighera, organised by the Centro di Sociologia delle Comunicazioni di Massa of the University of Rome, and the French-Swiss Centre d'Étude des Littératures d'Expression Graphique, later renamed «Club des bandes dessinés». «I «fumetti» sono una cosa seria», read the headline of the front-page article devoted to the event in Corriere mercantile (1824-2015); and the subheading echoed it: «Insigni studiosi di sociologia sostengono che la loro lettura non è affatto indice di infantilismo. Persino l'UNESCO ne ha riconosciuto l'importanza e la necessità di farli oggetto di ricerche scientifiche».41

The special guest at the international exhibition was no less than the creator of «Li'L Abner», Al Capp. The ostentatious, worshipping reception he received by the Italian and French intelligentsia became the topic of a satirical article that he wrote and illustrated for the edition of Life issued on 30 April, 1965,42 reprinted two months later for Life International, with Capp's illustration on the cover page (fig. 6).43 The headline read «Al Capp among Europe's Intellectuals. A Hilarious Account by the Cartoonist», while the article ironically commented on this crusade for comics headed by Eco and the French film director Alain Resnais.

The satirical vignette visually rendered the sardonic tone of the article, which underlined the presence of an all-

## Storia dei fumetti

Calendario/Iº - di Klark Kinnaird

3000 a.C. Tra gli Egizi circolano vignette con animali, disegnate e colorate su scaglie di calcare e papiri.

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di Guido Crepax LA CURVA DI LESMO - Iº Oreste Del Buono il "bona fide" personaggi della L'ORA! SEGNALE -FENOKEE HARLIE Peanuts Li'l Abner Krazy Kat Neutron piccoli, la prima FIGURINE **DI LINUS** 

Fig. 5 linus 2, May 1965, p. 61.

male audience of intellectuals at the Salon - apart from the lady translator who was made the object of less than honourable attentions by one of the men - but also made interesting remarks about the language gap.

THE DIRECTOR, surrounded by a swarm of savants, kids, photographers and one young female interpreter, was waiting excitedly on the Palazzo steps to greet me. The interpreter said she hoped I'd be patient, for she was not very experienced. I was shown through several galleries of original comic strip drawings, mostly American. It was a joy to see the work of artists with the genius to illuminate the absurdity or, as in the «adventure» strips, the perils of a fantastic but comprehensible world. [...] A Marcello Mastroianni type

rose, looked yearningly at the girl (not because she was anything to be yearned for, but because she was the only girl around, and he was Italian). She quivered, and translated: «The Professor from Genoa inquires, what was your motivation for creating (Li'l Abner> in 1934?»

«Hunger», I replied. «I was very hungry in 1934. So I created (Li'l Abner). It became big business and I became overweight. Since then my motivation has been greed».

Falk, Andriola and the photographer laughed. Raw truth amuses Americans. The girl translated. None of the Italians laughed. They all nodded gravely.

«I bombed», I said.

«In the translation», the photographer explained, «it came out you cre-



bile corretta e " pulita" tipograficamente, vi proponiamo un gioco cattivo: LINUS CONTRO TUTTI. Noi faremo il possibile perchè su Linus non ci sia un solo errore. I lettori dovranno dimostrarci il contrario. Se ci sarà l'errore, il primo lettore che ce l'avrà fatto notare riceverà in omaggio un abbonamento. Se nessuno, invece, troverà degli errori (errori palesi, beninteso), LINUS VINCE e tutti saranno moralmente impegnati a procurare nuovi lettori facendo acquistare Linus da amici e conoscenti.

## Notizie varie

La copertina di Life del 14 giugno è di Al Capp. All'interno un suo articolo, piuttosto vivace e qua e là assai fantasioso, sul festival dei comics di Bordighera e su i suoi " incontri » europei con gli appassionati di fumetti.

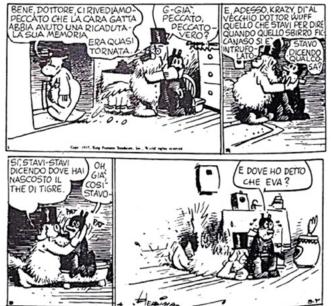




## Recensioni

È uscito in Francia, l'ultimo libro di Sempé, «MONSIEUR LAMBERT» (Denoël, L. 2.300). Non è una raccolta di « cartoons » singoli, come i precedenti volumi dello stesso autore, ma una vicenda continua, con un filo conduttore, dei personaggi fissi e un dialogo a fumetti.

L'ambiente è un ristorante parigino del genere « familiare », con i suoi « menus » tipici e ricorrenti, i suoi avventori abituali, la sua atmosfe-



20

ated «Li'l Abner» as a protest against the greed of American big business». «I meant my greed», I said to the girl. «Tell 'em *that*!»

She translated. The Italians nodded sympathetically. A few applauded. «To translate her translation», said the photographer, «you consider your pen a lance against the forces of obsessive materialism. You see, she likes you. The little touches she adds are making a much finer impression on this crowd than if they knew what you were really saying. Better let her handle it her way».<sup>44</sup>

This anecdote, accompanied by the account of other, wanted or unwanted misinterpretations, throws light on two interrelated issues: the first one is that the European intelligentsia was opening to an Anglophone world that needed to be made not only culturally in the broadest sense, but linguistically accessible; the second one is that «all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose»,<sup>45</sup> allowing in this case selections, interpretations, and adjustments aimed at building, with the support of intellectuals, the desired image of American culture.<sup>46</sup>

The language gap also led to a debate among intellectuals about the possibility or impossibility of translating comics of such complexity. In the article, Al Capp ironically noted that his language had been compared to that of *Finnegan's Wake*.<sup>47</sup> This view was in fact expressed in *linus* by Bruno Cavallone, for example when he compared Kelly's «Pogo» to Ionesco, Shakespeare, and Lewis Carroll, commenting that, of all that wealth, the unfortunate translator could obviously retain «solo le briciole».<sup>48</sup>

## **Gradual Acclimatization**

Especially in the first year, the revolutionary role played by the magazine should be explored not in political affirmations but in the tension between American and Italian culture expressed by the language and complemented by the translators and editors' recurring comments. As observed by Venuti, the translation process is never invisible. The idea that the target text faithfully mirrors the source text is an illusion. Language and translation are inherently ideological and selective processes, since facts cannot be separated from

values, beliefs, and representations that are inscribed in language [...] and that maintain or challenge the hierarchies in which social groups are positioned [...]. Ideology is thus indistinguishable from value judgment, it is a quintessentially political concept, and it turns the analysis of translated texts into a critique of their politics made from a different, usually opposing ideological standpoint.<sup>49</sup>

Hence a translation may represent a litmus test of ideological strategies in shaping cultural discourse, revealing a short-circuit between different cultural polysystems.<sup>50</sup>

The idea that a translation is «at once self-determining and determined by human nature, individualistic yet generic,

- 44 Capp: How Li'l Abner Became the Intellectuals' Delight (US edition), p. 102.
- 45 Theo Hermans (Ed.): The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation. London (1985), p. 11.
- 46 Laura Chiara Spinelli: Traduzione e conflitto: il fumetto americano nella politica editoriale della rivista «Linus». In: Piano B. Arti e culture visive, 2.1 (2017), pp. 44-64, p. 47, https://pianob.unibo.it/article/view/7266/7014.
- 47 Capp: How Li'l Abner Became the Intellectuals' Delight (US edition), p. 102.
- 48 Cavallone: Pogo e la contea di Okefenokee. In: linus 4 (1965), p. 65. «[...] only the crumbs».
- 49 Lawrence Venuti: The Translator's Invisibility. Oxon, New York (2018), pp. ixf.
- 50 Spinelli: Traduzione e conflitto, p. 44.

- 51 Venuti: The Translator's Invisibility, p. 67.
- 52 Ibid., p. xiii.
- 53 Interdonato: Linus, p. 45.
- 54 linus 2 (1965), p. 15.
- 55 Cavallone: Li'l Abner e gli Shtunk slobboviani. In: linus 2 (1965), p. 41.
- 56 Cf. Spinelli: Traduzione e conflitto, p. 44.
- 57 Valerio Rota: La marca dello straniero. Mottola 2004. See also Federico Zanettin (Ed.): Comics in Translation. Oxon, New York 2008.
- 58 Kai Mikkonen: The Narratology of Comic Art. London 2017, p. 226.
- 59 linus 9 (1965), p. 1.

transcending cultural difference, social conflict, and historical change»<sup>51</sup> is illusory. Every translation entails a degree of domestication and foreignisation, the former privileging immediate recognition of the source text in the target culture, the latter preserving its «otherness». Education to otherness was indeed also part of *linus*'s editorial project: the headlines contained many English words, while some comic strips, especially in the «Giro del mondo» section that appeared from issue 4, were left in the original language. However, also these attempts can be seen in the light of a foreignising process that lays bare «not the foreignness of the source text itself, but rather a foreignism [...] subject to variation, depending on the changing cultural situations and historical moments of various interpreters and translators».52

As part of linus's ambitious cultural project, there was indeed the need to (domesticate) a language and a sociocultural context with which Italian readers were just then becoming familiar. As Interdonato remarks, the magazine itself was, since its appearance, «an alien body grafted onto the papers on display in the homeland newsstands».53 «Gradual acclimatization»54 was an integral part of the editorial project. When introducing «Li'l Abner», for example, Bruno Cavallone explained that the language of the Yokums is «an ungrammatical and unruly American English, in which words are written as they are pronounced but according to a very peculiar pronunciation»; the translation of the episode was a first experiment to define the possibility of rendering those distortions into Italian,<sup>55</sup> and, in fact, the language of the strips would become more and more daring in the following issues. In the introductory sections to each strip, and sometimes in the footnotes, the characters and the way they speak, culture-specific and political references (Roosevelt, McCarthyism, Kennedy's presidency) were all explained to the reader, along with the problems encountered in the translation. As Spinelli underlines, the reader was informed about the cultural and linguistic difficulties inherent in the translation, of the problem of dealing with stories that referred to specific aspects of American politics, observed and consumed by a historically and ideologically dissimilar public. 56

The geographical, political, and cultural spaces of comics strips could not be ignored. Since graphic elements cannot be modified by translation, comics are an artistic form that reveals more than others their foreign origin.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, «[S] tylistic elements of writing, such as lettering, typography, and fonts, as well as what has been called para- or quasi-balloonic phenomena, can be incorporated in a dialogue scene»<sup>58</sup> require a high degree of creativity on the part of the translator, to the point that, in the editorial of issue 9, the translators' imagination is compared to that of the cartoonists.<sup>59</sup>

Each comic strip posed different challenges. In the first issue, for example, Bruno Cavallone also introduced, along with the «Peanuts», culture-specific references contained in the strips, namely the celebration of Halloween. The rituals were somehow like those of All Saints, but the translator was aware of the cultural dif-

ferences between the Italian and American context. He also explained linguistic choices: the use of «Grande Cocomero» (= «big watermelon») instead of «Grande Zucca» for «Big Pumpkin» was justified by the need to find a name whose gender was male, since Linus's Great Pumpkin was supposed to stand for the sabbatical personification of a male, god-like figure.60 We have then many other examples of cultural domestication: «marshmallows», which would turn popular among Italian children only much later, was translated as «toffolette» (= «little toffees») while instead of complaining about eating «figgy pudding» a month after Christmas, Snoopy protests about the stale «panettone». Intertextual references are domesticated as well: instead of writing another Heart of Darkness or Daisy Miller, Snoopy might have become Tomasi Di Lampedusa and authored The Leopard, which was then the epitome of fame for Italian readers, also because of the recent success of Visconti's film.

Each new strip was introduced as a world, at once geographically located and vague. Pogo's Okefenokee Swamp, for example, actually on the border between Georgia and Florida, was defined by translator Bruno Cavallone as «the temple of all the quintessentially American myths and traditions» and «socially speaking, the most atypical and abstract place that you may conceive».61 He described Pogo as extremely complex, «a Baroque artwork» that had to be slowly and painstakingly assimilated before the reader could start appreciating it. It presented innumerable difficulties: different jargons (of politics, sports, advertising)

and each jargon written in a different font (the Senator speaks in Gothic, the circus agent in fin-de-siècle font full of flowers, indexes, stars and comets).<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the translator was aware that these were not just linguistic and technical constraints: rhetorical and visual strategies allowed Kelly to outline a satire of American society expressed in terms of «a mock-pastoral».<sup>63</sup>

As highlighted by Spinelli, the study of translation in the first five years of the magazine reveals that overt political satire was subjected to «negotiations in power relations»,<sup>64</sup> aimed at either giving resonance to the ideology of the source text or showing a conflict with it. This was apparent, for example, in the omission of the strips of «Li'l Abner» which parodied Kennedy's «impartiality» in his run for presidency: «(Impartial) is right!! He won't help anyone else to be president».65 More generally, what the editors of linus witnessed in the second half of the 1960s was a re-conceptualisation of society and power<sup>66</sup> in which translation played a crucial role.

# Satire in *linus*: From Parable to Chronicle

The dramatic events of the 1960s made the idea of a magazine as a self-contained world problematic. Occasional references to American politics were actually present in *linus* from the very first year of publication: Al Capp's criticism towards the contention of third-world countries by the two superpowers, for example, 60 linus 1 (1965), p. 5.

- 61 Bruno Cavallone: Alla scoperta dei Peanuts, p. 3.
- 62 Bruno Cavallone: Pogo e la contea di Okefenokee, p. 65.
- 63 Reuel Denney: The Revolt Against Naturalism. In: Davis Manning White / Robert H. Abel (Eds.): The Funnies. An American Idiom. Glencoe 1963, pp. 67-85, p. 71.
- 64 Spinelli: Traduzione e conflitto, p. 48 and p. 59.
- 65 Ibid., p. 59.

66 Ibid., p. 44.

- 67 «Li'l Abner». linus 5 (1965), p. 23.
- 68 linus 29 (1967), p. 62. «We've been accused of being communists because we publish the American Feiffer; of being fascists because we publish the American Al Capp; of being Democrats because we publish the protester Feiffer and the indifferent Al Capp alike. [...] War comics [...] are undoubtedly connected to politics, given that the war in question is the bitter Vietnam war. We could predict the reactions and protests. [...] Our opinions on the Vietnam issue are unwavering. We pity the American soldiers who are finding their death there, but we can't help feeling on the side of the barricade where people are fighting for their freedom».
- 69 Ibid.

70 linus 29 (1967), p. 21.

was mentioned in the introductory note to the episode of «Li'l Abner» «Progetto PU», while the episode «Nomotocar» was defined as a modern parable on the Japanese threat as America's next economic competitor.<sup>67</sup>

The Vietnam war and Kennedy's role in it rekindled the association of comics with American imperialism, especially when the magazine published Jerry Capp's and Joe Kubert's Tales of the Green Beret, whose texts and actions set in Vietnam seemed animated by a pro-military intent, despite the authors' claim that their main purpose was the representation of adventurous situations. Gandini defended the editors' freedom to publish strips independently from the critical, social, and political ideas they conveyed and, conversely, the cartoonists' freedom from getting their editors' ideological consensus.

Qualcuno ci ha accusato di essere comunisti, perché pubblichiamo l'americano Feiffer, qualcuno ci ha accusato di essere fascisti, perché pubblichiamo l'americano Al Capp, qualcuno ci ha accusato di essere democratici, perché pubblichiamo il protestatario Feiffer come il qualunquista Al Capp [...]. Il fumetto di guerra [...] è collegato senz'altro alla politica, dato che la guerra di cui si tratta è quella amarissima del Vietnam. Immaginiamo, quindi, reazioni e proteste. [...] Compiangiamo i soldati americani che vi muoiono, ma non possiamo non sentirci dal lato della barricata ove è il popolo che lotta per la propria libertà.68 In so doing, the magazine tended to ideologically mirror an implied readership of «radical socialists or liberals with anarchic fantasies».<sup>69</sup> Yet, until Gandini was editor-in-chief, it was difficult to define the political position of *linus*. In fact, Gandini was sceptical about the possibility of having an Italian satire, although he acknowledged the impossibility that a magazine might be *apolitical*, and humour (especially visual humour) non-satirical: «[P]olitical satire has always been part and parcel of humour, either graphic or other kinds of humour.»<sup>70</sup>

The youth protests of April-May 1968 could not be overlooked, but even those decisive events were treated with ironic distance. In the April issue (fig. 7), the cover showed Woodstock and another bird facing each other with wooden signs containing an exclamation mark and a comma, respectively; in the May issue (fig. 8), a dizzy Snoopy sat in the middle of a circle of Woodstocks rallying with signs containing either a question or an exclamation mark.

The protest was not represented through articulated discourse but visualised as a battle of paradigmatically different signs. The smooth-edged bubble that symbolised free speech was substituted by, or paired with, a square sign, the unyielding space of slogans. Of course, *linus* sided with the students who were fighting against institutional power and for the ideals of freedom and cosmopolitanism; at the same time, though, the magazine criticised the old-school rhetorical language used in student assemblies and manifestos.

Col nostro pezzo introduttivo incriminato volevamo solo...



Fig. 7 linus N° 37, April 1968. Courtesy of *linus*.

Fig. 8 linus N° 38, May 1968. Courtesy of *linus*.

mettere le mani avanti e, semmai, fare dell'ironia su di un solo punto: il linguaggio che il movimento studentesco, e gli altri raggruppamenti, sprecano in assemblea, nei manifesti, nei comunicati. Si vuole rinnovare tutto; si cominci allora dal linguaggio. Invece, per il momento, non si è fatto altro che rispolverare l'oratoria vetusta di autentico primo maggio, e la si è condita con l'oscuro gergo socio-filosofico di moda. Se invece di dire: «Il Rettore ha strumentalizzato le forze repressive dell'autoritarismo», si dicesse più semplicemente: «Il Rettore ha chiamato la polizia», forse anche la lamentata diffidenza della classe operaia verrebbe meno. E quella di Pasolini.71

In Italy, the *Sessantotto* went unheeded by a political class paralysed by the unproductive efforts made by the secretary of the Communist Party Giorgio Amendola and the secretary of the Christian Democratic Party Aldo Moro to open to a wider centre-left alliance. On 12 December 1969 the far-right attacked the National Bank of Agriculture in Piazza Fontana, Milan: 17 people were killed and 88 injured. One year later, the Italian National Front leader Junio Valerio Borghese attempted a coup d'état. History was knocking at the door.

This dramatic situation was accompanied by a radical change in the editorial line of the magazine. In December 1971 Milano Libri ceased to be the publishing brand of linus and Gandini its editor-in-chief. For the next decade, the weekly would be published by Rizzoli under the direction of Oreste Del Buono. Its contents showed that the magazine uncompromisingly espoused the cause of the students and factory workers who were striking and demonstrating in the streets. Now the satirical vignettes of Italian cartoonists - particularly Altan (fig. 9), but also Lunari, Sozzari, Calligaro, Pericoli, Vincino & Vauro - acquired more visibility than the strips of Schulz, Capp, Kelly, Herriman, Segar, and Jordan.

*Linus* incontestably became a satirical magazine that no longer shot arrows only at distant political targets, or laid 71 linus 40 (1968), pp. 22f. «With our blamed introductory piece, we just wanted... to pre-empt and, if anything, to make irony on just one point: the language that the student movement, and other groupings, lavishly use in their assemblies, posters, and announcements. Do we want to make it new? Then let's start with language. So far, instead, what has actually been done is to brush up an outdated, genuine Labour Day rhetoric, spicing it up with the obscure socio-philosophical jargon that has nowadays become so fashionable. If instead of saying <the Rector exploited the repressive forces of authoritarianism> they would plainly say «the Rector called the police>, maybe the working class would stop distrusting them, as they claim. And so would Pasolini».

- 72 Cf. Interdonato: Linus, p. 337.
- 73 Oreste Del Buono, p. 142. «[...] la partecipazione, la passione, anche la rabbia, insomma un certo sommovimento interiore».

bare social conflicts through parables set in the haze of oneiric places. It now shot them at close and recognizable targets the government, the Catholic Church, Italian social gaps - using satire as a tool for analysing the country.<sup>72</sup> In the 1970s Milan was a place where tensions could be literally breathed, and people wanted to experience the spell of comics while remaining wide awake. Yet this politicisation of comics leading to a one-sided satire generated mixed feelings even in the editors of the magazine. Oreste Del Buono remarked that too much theory about something as simple as political satire, whose sole target should be the abuse of power, was no longer fun, and by «fun» meaning participation, passion, anger, an inner excitement.73



Fig. 9 linus Anno 14, N° 7 (1978).

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