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**De Turris, Gianfranco, ed. (with the help of
Claudio Gallo) *Le aeronavi dei Savoia.*
Protofantascienza italiana 1891-1952
Editrice Nord. Milano, 2001. p. 434.**

This is an anthology of 39 short stories by Italian authors, stretching roughly from the last decades of the nineteenth century - the time of the pioneers, H.G. Wells and J.H. Rosny - to the so-called "golden age" of American science-fiction in the 1950s. The editor's goal is to disprove the time-honoured cliché about the non-existence of an autonomous, original sci-fi in Italy, or of it being so marginal as to be nearly insignificant. The thickness of the volume and the diversity of the stories more than adequately demonstrate that the slower growth of science-fiction in Italy with respect to the United States or other countries was certainly not due to a lack of willing authors.

De Turris supports his thesis with both quantitative and historical reasons. The author laments the lack of systematic studies on the origins and development of Italian science-fiction, similar to those which have been recently showing the existence of an Italian tradition of fantastic storytelling and crime writing, both of which have been largely ignored by official criticism in spite of their interest and literary value. The results of his research lead him to question the traditional view connecting the development of science-fiction to the presence of a deeply-rooted scientific culture. Indeed, the presumed lack of enthusiasm by Italian authors for science-fiction, not to mention the lack of preparation on the part of the public, is usually attributed to the delayed onset in the Italian peninsula of the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, the conservative and authoritarian political regimes of the time are accused of fostering a climate of suspicion towards any form of "popular" (and therefore politically hazardous) literature, which would have further slowed the development of an autonomous version of science-fiction. De Turris goes against these "preconceived opinions, both in terms of premises and in terms of consequences", by revealing the sizeable presence of a scientifically-aware vein of fiction writing spanning both "highbrow" and "lowbrow" culture, starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, not just in France but also in Italy. The stories included in the anthology have been printed mostly in weekly or monthly magazines meant for general readership: from the famous *Domenica del Corriere*, representing family reading par excellence, to more clearly travel or adventure-oriented reading like the *Giornale Illustrato dei Viaggi* or more definitely literary journals such as *Le grandi firme*. The editor concludes that the slow development of Italian science fiction is not attributable to the lack of quality material or to an alleged reticence on the part of the writers, but to the different development of the publishing market, which favoured the growth of pulp magazines in the U.S. Specialized magazines did not take root in Italy until the middle of the 1950s.

Though it may be somewhat excessive to state that "if the stories of this anthology had been written by American authors they would have become 'classics' of

science-fiction, translated all over the world", the quality of several of the stories will not leave the reader indifferent. In spite of their datedness, or maybe because of it, the selected texts have a pleasant old-fashioned ring to them, a nostalgic flavour that makes for consistently enjoyable reading, spotted with surprises and sometimes quite delightful. The featured authors include representatives from the pantheon of "popular" literature (Emilio Salgari, Luigi Motta...) as well as high culture (Luigi Capuana, Guido Gozzano, Massimo Bontempelli...), not to mention numerous authors whose names have disappeared in the mist of time but whose texts are not less interesting because of that. The editor has wisely decided to divide the stories according to theme as opposed to presenting them in chronological order. There are, for example, sections on "Extraordinary inventions", "Mad scientists", "Future wars", "Catastrophes", but also on "Paranormal adventures", to recall the close relationship between sci-fi and spiritualist research which so fascinated late nineteenth-century authors. This anthology represents a very welcome and exciting first step towards a more detailed study of the origins of Italian science-fiction and will certainly prove of interest to the aficionados of this particular branch of modern literature.