many quotes without context or analysis, which makes it difficult to understand him without a solid philosophical background. “Mutation” is two pages long, while “Prolongation de la vie” [Prolongation of life] runs to eighteen pages. Oddly, the topic of doping is divided into four separate articles by three different authors.

Despite these awkward organizational choices, the quality of the content is undeniable. There are many wonderful articles in this book, not all pertaining to the technical aspects of transhumanism such as nanotechnologies and cyberbodies. The article “Corps humain” [Human body] is a clear and organized discussion of the history of and quandaries surrounding a concept that has changed much throughout the ages. As the author rightly puts it: “Rien de plus « naturel » que le corps, et rien de moins « naturel » [Nothing is more “natural” than the body and nothing is less “natural” than the body] (46). This quote underlines the intrinsic volatility of the term “natural.” In the third part, longtime readers of science fiction might not learn much from the entry “Science-fiction” or “Cyberpunk.” However, the articles “Art et Bio-corps” and “Art et Techno-corps” [“Art and Bio-body” and “Art and Techno-body”] offer interesting perspectives on the issues sf also explores. Indeed, the author of both entries, Chloë Pirson, supplies many references to contemporary transhumanist art forms by visual and plastic artists around the world and offers excellent in-depth analysis of several art pieces.

What will become of the human body is not only the business of scientists, philosophers, and artists. L’Humain et ses préfixes makes clear that transhumanism is omnipresent. Although we cannot know what the human body will look like, what it will do, or what it will think thousands of years from now, the changing process has already begun and it touches us all.—Annabelle Dolidon, Portland State University


This dense monograph by Giulia Iannuzzi came as a surprise. What I was expecting was the second volume of her Fantascienza italiana: Riviste, autori, dibattiti dagli anni Cinquanta agli anni Settanta [Italian SF: Magazines, Authors, Debates from the 1950s to the 1970s], also published by Mimesis in 2014, which mapped the complex world of Italian sf magazines from 1952 to 1980. By focusing on the story of six important Italian magazines, that volume offered readers a widescale and well-wrought picture of the history of Italian sf before 1980, showing how narrative models were imported, mostly through translations, to be assimilated, reused, and mutated by Italian writers. Iannuzzi thus showed that the Italian sf tradition cannot be understood in terms of a nation-based model of literary history but rather must be seen as a non-linear story of chasms and geological faults, where the development of science-fictional devices and narratives is absolutely not self-contained. No wonder, then, that some of the key figures in this story (e.g., Vittorio Curtoni or Roberta
Rambelli) were translators—that is, cultural mediators who grafted English-language scientific imagination onto a culture whose models were the ancient Greek and Roman classics, the great authors of the Italian middle ages, plus the French, German, and Russian modern classics.

Iannuzzi’s Fantascienza italiana was a welcome contribution to the study of Italian sf, a field in which solid academic works are rare and amateur critics abound; and in the Italian scene, divided by a spirit of campanilismo [excessive civic pride], non-academic critics and experts all too often tend to overestimate the importance of local heroes and downplay or ignore the achievements of authors from other parts of the country (or belonging to other groups of an exceedingly sectarian fandom). What was needed was a balanced picture depicting all the threads of Italian sf’s complex tapestry, and Iannuzzi began to paint it with her Fantascienza italiana. Yet Distopie, viaggi spaziali, allucinazioni is not the second part of her history of Italian sf magazines; this time, the focus is on four authors who have played an important role in the development of Italian sf and sf in Italy.

The opening chapter, “Fantascienza italiana contemporanea: Il quadro storico e critico” [Contemporary Italian SF: Historical and Critical Frame], presents us with an 80-page overview of Italian sf from its origins to the present day. Iannuzzi suggests Dante’s Divine Comedy (1320) and Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1532) as forerunners, notwithstanding that the former’s spaceflight is allegorical and the latter has more to do with heroic fantasy than sf. What follows, however, is a good introduction to the history of sf in Italy, covering literature, cinema, and television, and proving Iannuzzi’s wide-ranging knowledge of both primary and secondary literature (including up-to-date English-language academic criticism). Iannuzzi competently covers the field of Italian sf, also depicted by Salvatore Proietti in the introductory overview included in the July 2015 SFS special issue on the subject; of course, having a lot more canvas than Proietti (his survey was fourteen pages long), she can tell the multi-faceted and non-linear story of how Italian sf was incubated and born at a more leisurely pace. Interestingly, she details how this development did not follow an autonomous line of growth but was repeatedly subject to the influence of external forces, such as the politics of cultural autarchia [self-sufficiency] enforced by the Fascist regime during the 1930s or the abrupt exposure to the sf produced in the United States and United Kingdom after 1945. Iannuzzi shows quite clearly that the consecutive waves of English-language sf (from the Golden Age to cyberpunk) turned into shockwaves that hit Italy and deeply affected the core community of sf fans and practitioners, the wider readership of the genre, and the publishing industry.

Iannuzzi also discusses how Italian sf survived in a tremendously hostile cultural environment, ostracized by academia, ignored or ignorantly berated by non-academic literary critics, snubbed by the most prestigious presses. Distopie puts the blame on the anti-scientific bent of Italian culture, plus the hostility towards non-realistic genres of the two strongest cultural traditions in post-WWII Italy—the Roman Catholic Church and the Communist Party. The lack of a scholarly community focused on sf made the situation even worse—though
there were interesting episodes, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, accurately recorded by Iannuzzi.

The introduction is followed by four monographic chapters dealing with four representative figures of Italian sf: Lino Aldani (1926-2009), Gilda Musa (1926-1999), Vittorio Curtoni (1949-2011), and Vittorio Catani (1940-). Of course, this is only a brief sample of the Italian sf canon (if such a canon really exists); yet these four writers are representative enough, as they are both sf authors and sf critics (Aldani and Curtoni), editors (Curtoni and Catani), or translators (Curtoni). Musa, on the other hand, is, as we shall see, both an interesting author and part of a complex network of sf experts, editors, practitioners, etc., so that Iannuzzi can present readers with a whole literary environment through her portrait of the author.

Chapter two is devoted to Lino Aldani, considered “the father of Italian sf,” not only for his stories and novels, but for having written the first Italian book-length critical discussion of sf, _La fantascienza_ [Science Fiction, 1962]. Iannuzzi does not offer readers a complete overview of Aldani’s oeuvre but focuses on a selection of his short stories and novels, preceded by a short biographical introduction; hers is a thematic approach, as she explains in the introductory section of this chapter, by pointing out three main directions in Aldani’s fiction: “[one] of adventurous sf, of revisited space opera; a dystopian direction, of sociopolitical reflection on modernity and its perspectives, often carried out in a satirical key; an introspective direction that tackles the unease of modernity from the point of view of the single individual and often comes to deal with the theme of madness” (103). Iannuzzi first manages to show how Aldani initially refashioned classical sf plots and devices coming from the English-language tradition; she then discusses short stories in which Aldani proves to have learned the lesson of the sociological sf of the 1950s, applying it to the fast-changing society of the Italian economic miracle (1950-63)—a tumultuous period of industrialization with deep and tearing contradictions. Then she tackles a few stories in which Aldani focuses on the issue of psychopathology as a by-product of modern society, plus the novel _La croce di ghiaccio_ [The Ice Cross, 1989], where the theme of madness is tied up with religion. The story of a Roman Catholic missionary visiting other planets, the novel echoes James Blish’s _A Case of Conscience_ (1958) and Ray Bradbury’s story “In This Sign” (1951). Iannuzzi correctly suggests J.G. Ballard as an important influence on Aldani, especially in his 1963 short story “Nemico invisibile” [Invisible enemy]: had she dealt with _Eclissi 2000_ (1979), which draws much from Ballard’s “Thirteen to Centaurus” (1962), she might have better depicted how Aldani managed to rework, in an original way, the narratives of the British author. She has, however, managed to show how Aldani’s career ran parallel to the evolution of Italian sf from the early 1960s to the 1990s, providing readers with a solid and extensive introduction to the author’s fictional worlds, and offering several interesting interpretive insights.

Chapter three contains a discussion of Gilda Musa, a very interesting figure who deserves more critical attention. Aldani was a math teacher in secondary schools, but Musa was educated in the humanities and had a more cosmopolitan
upbringing, having graduated in Milan but then specialized in German literature at Heidelberg and English literature at Cambridge. Before starting to write sf, she was a respected poet, translated Brecht and Wiechert, and married writer, critic, screenwriter, and editor Inisero Cremaschi (1928-2014), who introduced her to a network of literati and intellectuals. No wonder that the magazine her husband edited, FUTURO, strove to publish literarily conscious sf and to involve such renowned authors/critics as Libero Bigiaretti or Mario Soldati in the debate on sf and its artistic value (163).

Interestingly, in the February 1978 issue of the Italian sf magazine Robot, a short story by Musa, “Gli ex-bambini” [The Former Children, 1978] was published with the translation of Ursula K. Le Guin’s story “Intracom” (1974) and James Tiptree Jr./Alice Sheldon’s “The Women Men Don’t See” (1973). The names of these three female writers are printed large on the cover of the issue so that a connection among them is evidently suggested by the editor, Vittorio Curtoni: specifically, their common interest in the theme of contact with alien species and its transcultural dimension. Most of Musa’s short stories and novels discussed by Iannuzzi deal with the contact/clash between humans and alien species, in a fashion that reminds readers of Le Guin’s anthropological approach to this theme. Musa is also interested—just like Le Guin—in ecology; her style is as elegant and only apparently simple as Sheldon’s; and the three writers use alien civilizations as touchstones to expose the ills and contradictions of humankind.

Iannuzzi also discusses “Treanta colonne di zeri” [Thirty Columns of Zeroes, 1964], an interesting variation on the theme of the insane spaceman that stands comparison with the treatment of this figure by such authors as John Wyndham, James E. Gunn, and Ballard. And I am grateful to her for having made me discover Musa’s first sf short story, “Memoria totale” [Total Memory, 1963], an impressive stylistic tour de force that uncannily anticipates one of Philip K. Dick’s best stories, “The Electric Ant” (1969). Musa, who is relatively neglected today, represents a very interesting case study illustrating how Italian sf writers managed to import themes, devices, and ideas from US and UK works and refashion them in original ways.

The fourth chapter deals with Vittorio Curtoni, arguably an inescapable choice. The role he played as editor and translator of English-language sf into Italian was absolutely crucial. Suffice it to say that in a time when Urania—the most important sf paperback series—often cut the translations of US and UK sf novels to fit its size, Curtoni published integral translations in the paperback series he edited with Montanari, Galassia. Moreover, Galassia published those New Wave writers (e.g., John Brunner, Dick, Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, Thomas M. Disch, Barry N. Malzberg) who had been banned by the editors of Urania, Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini. Moreover, Curtoni was the editor of Robot, a short-lived (1976-79) magazine that accepted works also by Italian authors and hosted important discussions on sf in general and the peculiarities of Italian sf in particular. In comparison with Curtoni’s activity as a translator and editor, his literary production pales; yet his only novel, Dove stiamo volando [Where Are We Flying, 1972], a gloomy post-holocaust story
of persecuted mutants, is representative of the taste of a decade—the 1970s—characterized by an atmosphere of impending (political, social, economic, environmental, demographic) catastrophe.

Curtoni’s best works are his stories, however, and the selection of short fiction discussed by Iannuzzi is well chosen. Once again, Curtoni manages to draw much from the American authors he translated and successfully “applies” them to the Italian scene; his narratives are often embittered and haunted by an overwhelming pessimism that surely has much to do with the grim atmosphere of a country torn by political terrorism, but also with the declining popularity of sf itself (the end of Robot due to insufficient sales in 1979 being part of this story). Curtoni’s bleak tales mirror those years in a vivid manner: hence, one wishes that Iannuzzi had gone deeper into the political aspects of his fiction. Though this chapter is scattered with hints at the social, political, and historical context of Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, no organic connection is made between the stories and their wider sociopolitical context. A paradox that should have been explored is the undeniable fact that Curtoni’s fiction is imbued with anti-Americanism, yet he was powerfully influenced by American authors (Malzberg first and foremost). May this be just a matter of distinguishing the (evil) American imperialism of the Cold War era from the (good) American counterculture? A more in-depth discussion of this aspect of the author’s work would have been appreciated.

The fifth chapter deals with the only living author, Vittorio Catani, even though at 76 he cannot be considered as belonging to a “new” generation. Probably Iannuzzi, by choosing authors whose lives began even before the term fantascienza was invented in 1952, aimed at discussing four figures endowed with an established reputation, whose long careers allowed the scholar to go back over the history of Italian sf. As for Catani, one must necessarily underscore the fact that he is the first winner of the Premio Urania with his 1990 novel Gli universi di Moras [Moras’s Universes], a solid story of alternate realities set in the region where the author lives, Apulia.

Catani, who published his first stories in the early 1960s, also gives Iannuzzi the opportunity to deal with themes and problems of the twenty-first century, especially in her discussion of his latest novel, Il quinto principio [The Fifth Principle, 2009]: “In his longest work, Catani has depicted a remarkably large scenario, rich in details and inventions on every scale, from the macroscopic dynamics of global economic markets to the technologies we use every day” (300). Drawing from his knowledge of finance (Catani worked as a bank manager), from the discourses about globalization and late capitalism, from the projections of cyberpunk, and from the forecasts about global warming and water scarcity (the novel features a tycoon who manages to purchase Antarctica for 10^15 Euros), Catani depicts a not-very-far future world by means of a novel whose multiple plots span the globe, with a believable display of technologies that may be under development today.

Iannuzzi stresses Catani’s interest, during the course of his 50-year career, in both the “hard” and the “soft” sciences (something that differentiates him from the other three writers, who generally favored the latter, or even the
humarties). She also examines the political implications of his stories and novels and the recurring theme of sexuality (often graphically depicted). As in the previous chapters, Iannuzzi does not claim to have offered a complete overview of Catani’s oeuvre, yet her choices allow readers to picture it quite accurately. What is sometimes missing is a connection with the wider realm of world sf (especially English-language sf, which exerted such a powerful influence on the generation of Catani and Curtoni); for example, when Iannuzzi discusses Catani’s 2006 short story “Soccerà il crisantemo” [The Chrysanthemum Will Bloom], she does not reconnect it to its quite evident model, Robert Silverberg’s 1974 novelette “Born with the Dead,” which Catani managed to rework in a rather original fashion (especially the ending).

A very short chapter of final remarks makes Iannuzzi’s purpose in writing her monograph explicit: her aim is “to prove ... the general capacity of the science-fictional repertoire to lend itself to a constant, fecund rewriting, in which the value and purpose of single works depend on the ability and the will of each author” (329): that is, to show the literary and cultural potential of the genre. Evidently such an inquiry is addressed to the general public and, above all, to Italian academia, which has not shown much interest in Italian sf so far. No wonder that the foreword to the volume, “Archeologie del futuro” [Archaeologies of the Future] has been written by Pierpaolo Antonello, an Italian studies scholar who teaches at the University of Cambridge.

All in all, Iannuzzi’s monograph (like her previous book, Fantascienza italiana) is a precious contribution to the study of sf in Italy. This is a fair-minded, well-documented, scholarly, and reliable monograph.—Umberto Rossi, Rome


As a literary form, science fiction has gradually worked its way into the global networks of academic discourse, but its infiltration has not prevented the persistence of certain head-scratching exclusions. Nowhere is this more apparent than with Lois McMaster Bujold, who has won four Hugo Awards for best novel (an achievement matched only by Robert A. Heinlein) and attracted a far-reaching, dedicated fan base, all while remaining largely ignored by academic critics. Some authors and texts are overlooked for understandable—if not entirely justifiable—reasons. This is not the case with Bujold, something Edward James makes abundantly clear in this first full-length study of her work. Along with the 2013 collection of essays edited by Janet Brennan Croft, Lois McMaster Bujold: Essays on a Modern Master of Science Fiction, James’s text signals a growing (and long overdue) recognition of an author who has been critically neglected since her emergence in 1986. What comes through most vividly in James’s study is the intricacy of Bujold’s world-building, the psychological depth of her characters, and the complexity of themes that are never simplified for the sake of easy consumption—features that make her absence from scholarly debate all the more perplexing.