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Foreign literature as poison: (self-)censorship in the translation of German popular fiction in Italy during the 1930s

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ABSTRACT

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the translation of foreign contemporary novels into Italian was encouraged by publishers, meeting the needs of a new readership, which was larger and more heterogeneous than before the war. However, the sharp rise in the number of imported novels provoked strong disapproval. In a context of heightened nationalism and cultural autocracy, translation was considered a polluting, anti-patriotic and servile practice. The censorship that took place, however, was mostly implemented via a tacit compromise between the publishers and the regime, rather than by repressive institutional actions. In order to protect themselves from sanctions and requisitions, publishers and translators often deleted potentially unpleasant elements from the texts, including topics such as abortion, suicide, pacifism, sexuality, women's emancipation or episodes belittling Italy. The analysis of German popular fiction translated into Italian in this period suggests that popular literature was translated with a high degree of manipulation. This may be ascribed to the low cultural status accorded to this type of literature and the modernity of the themes it contained. Furthermore, while 'high literature' catered to a niche readership, the widespread circulation of popular literature made it seem more dangerous and thus more subject to censorship.

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Introduction

The idea of Fascist Italy as an isolated regime that was impenetrable to foreign influence has been superseded thanks to various studies published in the last 15 years that have shown how receptive Fascist Italy was to European novelties (Barrale, 2012; Esposito, 2004; Rubino, 2002; Rundle, 2010). Between the end of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, Italian translation of foreign contemporary novels grew significantly, encouraged by small and large publishers and in response to the growth of a new readership that was larger and more heterogeneous than before the First World War.

The analysis of book series (Rubino, 2002) and magazines published between the late 1920s and the early 1940s document the primary role played by contemporary German fiction in this new market, where the number of translations from German was much larger than that of English and American literature (Esposito, 2004, p. 13).

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In this article, I examine the political stance of the Fascist regime towards translations, focusing in particular on German contemporary popular fiction and looking at the way in which publishers and translators were more likely to adopt self-censorship practices in order to avoid direct intervention by the regime's censors. In the following sections, after a general overview of translation during Fascism, I focus on the Italian translation of a corpus of novels that belong to three specific genres that were particularly successful, with the aim of showing the high number of changes to the text that were implemented in this kind of translated literature. My argument is that even though this type of popular fiction was not explicitly against Fascism, its 'modern' topics went against the regime's cultural values and therefore attracted its attention. Furthermore, the wide diffusion of popular fiction, which was sold through cheap book series, was perceived as a serious danger to the moral health of the masses, even more so than 'highbrow' texts that were addressed to a smaller segment of readers. Publishers, in their turn, responded to this attention on the part of the regime with a higher level of caution and often resorted to self-censorship practices in order to prevent the intervention of the censor.

Translations and the regime

Until 1919, the reception of German literature in Italy had been limited to the traditional literary canon, which was entirely focused on Goethe, Schiller, Hoffmann and on works of the classic-romantic period. However, during the years that immediately followed the First World War, a new group of intellectuals, both translators and critics, began to write essays, reviews and monographs about contemporary works, thus giving life to a new process in the reception of German literature and introducing the Italian audience to the most important literary novelties.

The activity and the lively initiative of a new generation of translators, together with the publishers' economic interests and a widespread curiosity towards the recent German events, contributed towards facilitating and improving the acquisition of German literature and culture in Italy (Giusti, 2000, p. 226). The profile of the new type of translator was not just that of somebody who had studied foreign languages and could translate a text into Italian; he or she was also an expert in German language, history and literature, and represented a real cultural intermediary between the two countries (Vittoria, 1997, p. 208). As a matter of fact, in the early 1920s the steps of reception, translation and editorial mediation became inseparable processes and were often linked to individual intellectuals, such as the well-known Lavinia Mazzucchetti, from Milan, or the Istrians Ervino Pocar, Alberto Spaini and Enrico Rocca in the field of German literature; Mario Praz for English studies; and Alfredo Polledro for Russian literature. By translating texts and reviewing translations of foreign literature in the Italian literary journals these intellectuals acted as experts and cultural mediators between Italy and other countries.

In April 1933, the German Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, proclaimed the 'Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist' [Action against the Un-German Spirit], which aimed at removing from circulation those books that were considered a threat to public morality and the purity of the Arian race. In May, the Action reached its height with the infamous Nazi book burnings: many German writers, such as Arnold Zweig, Lion Feuchtwanger, Alfred Döblin, Erich Maria Remarque and Thomas and Heinrich Mann,

were banned from publication. Some of them even decided to leave Germany, or were driven to exile; others were deprived of their citizenship.

Even though cultural life in Germany was upset by these significant events, in Italy the number of translations of German fiction did not decrease at all (Fabre, 1998, p. 322). In fact, the opposite took place: during the Nazi regime Fascist Italy published more translations of *jüdische Emigrantenliteratur*, literature by exiled Jewish writers, than any other country in the world (Rubino, 2002, p. 91).

As shown by Rundle (2010), the Fascist regime did not intervene to hinder translations during its first years, something that has to be ascribed, first of all, to the liberal image that Fascism wanted to project of itself. Restrictive cultural and censorship policies would have compromised a delicate process of self-definition in which Fascism wanted to be portrayed as a regime of freedom, where individuality and independence were guaranteed and respected, in declared contraposition to democratic levelling and Communist annihilation (Ben-Ghiat, 2004, p. 22). Second, the regime was aware of the economic importance of the translation market for Italian publishers, who had always been faithful backers of the new political system. The strength of the alliance between publishing and Fascism was especially due to the production and distribution of school books, a sector in which the interests of private business joined those of the regime. Mussolini was therefore probably unwilling to implement restrictions that could be detrimental to the interests of Italian publishers (Rundle, 2000, p. 72).

Conversely, until the first half of the 1930s the regime promoted a sort of cultural internationalism. Considering the repressive methods used by Fascist censorship some years later, this may run contrary to expectations. This openness to foreign cultures was encouraged, for instance, by Giuseppe Bottai (Minister of National Education during Fascism) and Luigi Chiarini (film theorist and director of the Venice International Film Festival), who wanted to promote a new national culture precisely through a gradual and selective appropriation of foreign cultures (Ben-Ghiat, 2004, p. 34). Newspapers began to give more space to foreign reportages, grants were allocated to literary journals that translated foreign articles, and a large amount of public funding was invested in modernizing Italian culture, organizing international meetings and promoting research institutes, all of which could help attract highly respected foreign intellectuals to Italy. The nationalist basis of Fascism and this cultural internationalism was 'one of the many paradoxes of Fascist cultural policy' (Dunnett, 2002, p. 98).

Foreign literature as poison

The relative cultural freedom that characterized the early years of Fascism started to change from the mid 1930s when the regime began to exert greater control over literary life in Italy. Cultural autarky resulted in the first regulations aimed at monitoring publishing, which were introduced between 1936 and 1938 and led to obstruction of the increasing flow of translations. Meanwhile, the sharp rise in the number of imported novels had provoked a harsh reaction against this xenophile surge in some individuals and sections of society. Within the literary establishment the taste for non-Italian fiction was regarded with alarm. In a context of strong nationalism and imposed cultural autocracy, translation began to be considered as a polluting, anti-patriotic and servile practice. Translations – often depicted by Authors and Writers Union and by its president, F. T. Marinetti, as a

sort of contamination – were presented not only as a threat to Italianness, but also as a form of unfair competition and cultural invasion (Rundle, 2004, p. 293). Many local writers and intellectuals began to show intolerance towards the importation of translations and expressed the fear that Italy might become subject to foreign cultures (Rundle, 2010, p. 113).

Valerio Ferme reported the text of an open letter to writers and publishers, which appeared in 1928 on the weekly *Il Torchio*, entitled 'L'invasione degli stranieri'.[1] In this letter the huge amount of translations was damaging 'la cultura media del lettore'[2] (Ferme, 2002, p. 78).

While *Il Torchio* was a small, far-right-wing paper, with a radical nationalist stance, in the late 1930s and early 1940s we see much more influential State personalities supporting the idea of restrictions. For instance, in 1938 the writer Corrado Govoni, director of a section of the Authors and Writers Union, voted for a motion against translations that stated:

> Consideriamo indispensabile per l'autarchia letteraria ora urgente scartare dalla traduzione e pubblicazione i tre quarti delle opere straniere che alcuni editori impongono, basandosi sul non abbastanza vituperato antico e permanente vizio italiano che noi chiamiamo esterofilia. Questa esterofilia avendo come conseguenza la denigrazione del prodotto letterario italiano trova nella moltiplicazione di mediocrissimi romanzi il suo ignobile alimento. (Corrado Govoni, cited in Anonymous, 1938, p. 33)[3]

In addition, Alessandro Pavolini, Minister of Popular Culture from 1939 to 1943, explicitly described translations as a sign of weakness and a form of pollution:

> Un'importazione disordinata ed avvelenatrice di dottrine, mode intellettuali, maniere del pensiero […] interamente estranee al genio e allo stile della razza. È nostra fatica assidua, ma in gran parte ormai già portata a compimento, quella di sanare la cultura nostrana da un siffatto inquinamento marginale.[4]

Pavolini saw translations as poisonous importations: this view of foreign cultures, even if short-sighted and distorted, deeply influenced translation practices, contributing to a more arbitrary approach to the source text and favouring the production and free circulation of highly manipulated translations. The censoring mechanisms used by the regime to control the importation of foreign fiction have already been the object of previous studies (Barrale, 2012; Bonsaver, 2007; Fabre, 1998; Rubino, 2002; Rundle, 2010). In this article, I focus on self-censorship practices, underlining that alongside evident instances of censorship on the part of the regime there was also a documented tendency – revealed by publishers and translators – to practise pre-emptive self-censorship. As a matter of fact, a large number of translated novels went through a *cleansing* and adaptive treatment guided by publishers, and censorship mostly took place through a tacit compromise between the publishers and the regime, rather than by means of repressive institutional action. Even without intervention by the censors, self-censorship of the texts was sometimes spontaneously applied inside the publishing houses. There was widespread awareness that censors would reject such themes as abortion, incest, suicide, pacifism, sexuality, women's emancipation, communism or any content belittling Italy.

As a form of preliminary self-censorship, publishers and translators often deleted every potentially 'controversial' element from the texts, thus protecting themselves from sanctions and requisitions. From the end of 1920s until 1938 this predisposition to compromise encouraged a steady flow of translated German fiction to Italy. Publishers

succeeded in protecting their mutual understanding with the regime and in safeguarding that delicate balance that ensured their survival.

In 1938, after the promulgation of Racial Laws, the consolidation of the Rome–Berlin Axis and the outbreak of the war, translations of contemporary German literature progressively decreased and suffered a serious setback; the number of titles published fell from 19 in 1937 to 11 in 1938, then nine in 1939, seven in 1940, and eventually six in 1941 (Rubino, 2002, p. 97). Paradoxically, this change is related to the political alliance between Italy and Germany in 1939, and to the ratification, some months before the political agreement, of a cultural pact also regulating the reception in Italy of German authors who were disapproved of in the *Reich*. The first measures discriminating against German literature appeared between spring and autumn 1938 and, by the end of 1940, Jewish and anti-Nazi authors had disappeared from the Italian publishing catalogues.[5] The cultural agreement between the two regimes stopped the flow of novels, which in the 1930s had introduced the Italian public to contemporary German fiction.

The wave of foreign works that had led to the discovery of a new, international narrative came up against the repressive practices of Fascist censorship, and was eventually blocked by a purge of publishers' catalogues and the requisition of banned books. The rich cultural landscape promoted by the circulation of foreign novels and the high sales of translated literature left only a limited range of books, which, even when they escaped being confiscated and survived cuts to the text, were subjected to strong alterations in both form and content.

Censorship and 'highbrow' literature

Studies of some translations of German novels (Barrale, 2012, 2015) indicate that censorship had a relatively limited impact on 'highbrow' literature – that is, on works by prominent authors such as Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig or Hermann Hesse, whose literary success was already well established in the European cultural landscape.

However, this does not seem to have been due to any reverence towards the authors or their work.[6] As a matter of fact, it is likely that not even respect for a specific set of aesthetic criteria, or fidelity to the source text, could entirely protect the works of these famous authors from censorship – since these concepts were not always considered in the translation industry at that time. A representative example is provided by the novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) by Arnold Zweig, which was cut by around 140 pages in the Italian translation (*La questione del sergente Grischa*, 1930). Apart from a few exceptions, these cuts were not politically motivated, but due to a publishing requirement – that is, the bulk of the book needed to be reduced in order to save on publishing costs (Barrale, 2012, pp. 195–225).[7] If the prestige of the author and the need to respect the original text's aesthetic qualities only marginally and occasionally affected the way in which it was censored, we must ask why it was that publishers and translators intervened much more drastically with popular novels. In the next section, I identify some elements that might have heightened the critical attention of the censor towards popular fiction.

The cultural status of popular fiction

The first feature I would like to consider is the low cultural status generally ascribed to 'popular fiction'. With the label 'German popular fiction', I refer to those contemporary

German novels that can be included in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] literary school, whose common denominator is the tendency to document 'social reality' whilst still seeking to entertain the reader. This latter element has also led to a description of *Neue Sachlichkeit* realist literature as *Unterhaltungsliteratur* [leisure literature], making its categorization into either popular or highbrow literature often controversial. While the sub-genres of *neusachlich* literature that I examine in the next section (war novels, women's novels, metropolitan novels) could perhaps be seen as positioned in the middle of the literary hierarchy, they were introduced in Italy following the publishing conventions of popular literature. As a consequence, the translated novels were distributed at a low price and in high print run series such as 'I Romanzi della Palma' and 'La Medusa', published by Mondadori, which catered to a varied range of tastes, and became extremely popular best sellers.

Except when dealing with a few authors, such as Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig and Hermann Hesse, who were already famous in Italy and with whom publishers and translators in Italy enjoyed close personal relations, translators usually felt they did not have many obligations towards the original text, as evidenced by their adoption of unscrupulous translation practices that allowed them to slip controversial texts through the mesh of the regime's censorship.

It must be noted that many contemporary reviewers explicitly praised the 'improvements' made by translators to foreign novels, in both cutting unsuitable parts and elevating their register. For example, in reviewing *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* by Arnold Zweig in the literary journal *L'Italia che scrive*, Leonardo Kociemski, an expert in literature from Northern Europe, explicitly praised the translator for cutting the length of the original novel:

> Enrico Burich ha ridotto alquanto le proporzioni del romanzo (che crediamo molto più lungo nell'originale) ma, pur senza aver fatto confronti, possiamo dire che questa riduzione ha forse giovato al romanzo stesso. (Kociemski, 1930, p. 357)[8]

The Italian translation of the novel by Hans Fallada, *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* [*Little man, what now?*] (1932), which was published in 1933 as *E adesso pover'uomo?*, sounded more 'literary' and 'softer' than the source German text, due to the omission of expressions from the spoken language and any dialect inflection. The translator, Bruno Revel, explains in the preface that he raised the linguistic register to make the novel more appropriate for Italian readers, 'in considerazione dell'orecchio latino più pudico e musicale'.[9] The translator also took the liberty of softening or omitting some 'sincerità volgari', 'intimità spiattellate' and 'certe espressioni un poco dure o un poco crude' (Revel, 1933, p. 9).[10]

This translation 'nonchalance' was even considered beneficial for those texts whose literary value was controversial. It was a validated practice, a real aesthetic crusade. Nonetheless, it is not hard to imagine that, under the guise of aesthetic improvement, these interventions were a way of softening potentially problematic material.

German popular fiction as a synonym of modernity

A second and maybe more important element that might have heightened the interest of the censor in popular fiction concerns the contents carried by contemporary German popular fiction. The *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which had come to the fore during the Weimar

Republic (1919–1933), aimed to document and represent daily life, thus stimulating the curiosity of readers, and embraced recent technological developments by adopting writing techniques derived from photography and cinema. Literary works became modern and functional, soaked in urbanism and technology, thus losing their idealistic aspirations towards eternal values. Literature now had to describe daily experiences using clear language, and deal with contemporary issues and social and political realities.

For Italian readers, who began to show a particular interest towards Germany and the way it faced up to the difficulties of the years following the First World War, the *neusachlich* prose represented a real window on modernity. The frantic lifestyle of Berlin, a modern Babel, teeming with cabarets, provided Italians with an idea of Germany where an unexpected wildness had replaced the old Prussian order and its legendary discipline. *Neusachlich* fiction participated in the creation of a new image of Germany, thus reversing the old prejudice based on the presumed heaviness of German literature.

The main ingredients of *neusachlich* literature – that is, representation of daily life and an enticing narrative form – also offered the possibility of understanding the current reality of a nearby country, and of discovering how Germany (a defeated enemy) was experiencing the aftermath of the First World War. The number of translations of contemporary German fiction, which had not been particularly significant until the end of the 1920s, increased dramatically in the space of a few years: between 1929 and 1932 Italian publishers translated as many as 48 German contemporary novels (Rubino, 2007, p. 248).

Neusachlich became synonymous with all things modern and functional. Neorealist prose, thanks to its tendency towards objectivity, was a critical cultural and linguistic breakthrough compared to the expressionistic, poetic language of the past. Writers now had a preference for sub-genres that were more suitable for documenting the contemporary world: *Frauenromane* [women's fiction], *Großstadtromane* [metropolitan novels] and *Kriegsromane* [war novels], for instance.

Among the most popular imported genres there were so-called *Frauenromane*. Works by Vicki Baum, Gina Kaus, Joe Lederer and Irmgard Keun introduced to the Italian context an ideal of femininity based on a seductive mix of independence and emancipation. The *Neue Frau* prototype of the career woman replaced the housewife from the age of William II, who was bound to the three Ks: '*Kinder, Küche und Kirche*' [children, kitchen, and church]. This new model of woman can be considered the real protagonist of popular fiction, both as a literary character and as a writer: on one hand, the *Neue Frau* was the main character in most female fiction of the time, full of salesgirls and typists with their difficult careers and their existential ups and downs; on the other hand, the writer herself was often seen by her audience as a *Neue Frau*, a real model of the emancipated career woman. The market of popular fiction, the cinema industry and the large circulation of periodicals opened to many female writers the doors of a professional field that had always been ruled by men. *Frauenromane*, novels written by and for women, were often serialized in magazines and periodicals and were a good starting point for female writers who wished to enter the literary market (Barndt, 2003).

In 1928, one of the first bestsellers by a female author was the novel *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* [*Helene Willfüer, Student of Chemistry*] by Vicki Baum, which was published in Italy in 1932 (*Elena Willfüer studentessa in chimica*) and was then followed by many *Frauenromane* during the 1930s. Among the most representative works that were

published to great acclaim, the following are also worth mentioning: *Gilgi – eine von uns* [*Gilgi, one of us*] (1931) by Irmgard Keun (*Gilgi, una di noi*, 1934); *Morgen um neun* [*Tomorrow at 9 o'clock*] (1932) (*Domani alle 9*, 1934) and *Die Schwestern Kleh* [*The sisters Kleh*] (1933) (*Le sorelle Kleh,* 1934), by Gina Kaus; and *Menschen im Hotel* (*Grand Hotel*, 1932), by Vicki Baum.

Considering the difference between the heroines of these German works and the female model promoted in Italy by Fascist propaganda (De Grazia, 2007, p. 109) it may be assumed that these novels presented a new and fascinating representation of femininity for Italian women. For the Fascist woman, who had to be a fertile and faithful housewife, the new German woman could represent a seductive alternative to the Fascist ideals of angel of the home and mother of future soldiers. Through this kind of novel, many Italian women fully disregarded the regime's expectation and its models of behaviour, and proved to be fascinated by the exotic adventures of the German female characters, as has been shown by studies about the books read by female readers during the 1920s and the 1930s.[11]

The same vaguely non-conformist elements that made these novels so attractive for the Italian female audience represented a subversive potential, which was dangerous enough to worry the regime: such novels furthered sterile and evasive dreams instead of the concreteness of a fecund and patriarchal family (Arslan & Pozzato, 1989, p. 1043). The control system of the Fascist State, which was able to watch over the importation of foreign novels and to isolate every threat to Italianness, also hindered the free circulation of some of these books. Faced with the risk of confiscation, publishers often chose the safest way: cuts and manipulations of 'troublesome' episodes were considered an acceptable way to reduce or cancel their 'anti-demographic' potential, and became very frequent procedures.

The second imported genre was the *Kriegsroman*, the war novel. At the end of the 1920s, the attempt to recall and artistically rework the experiences of the First World War prompted the publication in Germany of many novels, short stories, collections of letters and war diaries, which quickly became extremely popular (Gollbach, 1978; Müller, 1986). One of the elements that led to the success of this genre was its declared ambition regarding objectivity.

The subject of the war, both attractive and thorny, was of great interest abroad as well; at last, somebody was narrating how the Germans had really experienced the war and their defeat. Novels by Erich Maria Remarque, Ernst Glaeser, Arnold Zweig, Ludwig Renn and Adrienne Thomas offered a double appeal: they satisfied a general curiosity towards *neusachlich* literature, but they also offered the possibility to reread the First World War from the point of view of a country that had first been an ally, then an enemy, and was eventually defeated. For the first time, Italian readers discovered the existence of German pacifists.

Finally, the *Großstadtromane*, sometimes also called *Angestelltenromane* [employee novels], described daily life in the city, and the complex relationship between the individual and the crowd – which was often symbolized by Berlin. Social and political disorders in Germany during the 1920s, inflation and the world economic crisis had induced writers to search for new literary forms that could portray their difficult daily life in a more concrete and detailed way. The themes of the metropolitan novels were unemployment, economic crisis and city life on the eve of Hitler's rise to power (Becker, 1995). Technological innovations, trains, cars, telephones, newspapers and movies made Berlin the centre of mass

culture, the place of modernity *par excellence*. The best-known metropolitan novel was *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) by Alfred Döblin. Other representative metropolitan novels that were published in those years with considerable success were: *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* [*Fabian. The story of a moralist*] (1931), by Erich Kästner; *Glückliche Menschen* [*Happy people*] (1931), by Hermann Kesten; and *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* [*Little Man, what now?*] (1932), by Hans Fallada. These authors, who narrated the existential challenges faced by those who tried their fortune in the city and risked drowning in their debts and failures, were very popular in Italy. Italy was, in fact, the first country to translate *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a clear example of the fascination the German metropolis was expected to exert on Italian readers. In 1930, less than one year after its publication in Germany, the publishing house Modernissima published Döblin's novel with the same title as the original and translated by Alberto Spaini.

Although certain critics raised some objections, labelling the New Objectivity as 'pseudo-literature', made of mere chronicles and rough documents, bound to everyday life and contingent events (Ben-Ghiat, 2004, p. 53), the success of these novels indicates that Italians appreciated their revolutionary upheaval of the old artistic canons, and understood very well the 'different' beauty of concreteness.[12] In addition, the realistic description of social and political issues was performed using a fluent language and more 'immediate' narrative structures (Rubino, 2002, p. 80), which probably contributed to the appreciation of these novels.

The literature of New Objectivity represented modernity as a world where abortion and suicide were far from uncommon, where young emancipated and economically independent women exhibited an enthusiastic sexuality, where people could talk about birth control, homosexuality, unemployment and the financial crisis. However, the more current and modern the themes, the more scandalous they appeared to the publishers, who carefully removed or mitigated them. In order not to incur sanctions or requisitions, translators, following publishers' directives, resorted to self-censorship mechanisms that affected those realistic and innovative features whose descriptive value had led to the success of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature in Germany. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into a detailed examination of the full corpus of translated New Objectivity literature, which would provide important quantitative data on the degree to which it was self-censored. However, the following examples, taken from a random sample of *neusalichlich* novels translated into Italian, can provide an illustration of the way in which self-censoring mechanisms operated in practice to prevent direct intervention from the censor.

In the Italian translation of *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* by Vicki Baum (published in 1932 by Mondadori and translated by Barbara Allason), almost all references to abortion were expunged, including a three-page episode in which the main character experiments with different techniques in order to stop an unwanted pregnancy (Baum,1928, pp. 95–97, 1932, p. 73).

Passages containing references to suicide were also removed, as this was one of the themes most opposed by Fascist ideology, which not only saw it as immoral but also dangerous given the risk of emulation. In the final part of *Musik der Nacht* [*Music of the night*] (1930) by Joe Lederer, the protagonist finds out she is suffering from a terminal illness and only has a few months of life left. In despair, she takes her own life. The Italian translation, *Storia di una notte* [*Story of a night*] (published in 1933 by Mondadori and translated by Barbara Allason), ends instead with a series of hyphens and suspension

points, following the description of the protagonist's tears as she learns about her illness, with a sort of 'fading out' effect (Lederer, 1933, p. 65).

Similarly, the heroine of *Dreiviertel Neugier* [*Three quarter curiosity*] (1934) by Adrienne Thomas does not throw herself under a car in its Italian translation (*Per tre quarti curiosità,* published in 1935 by Mondadori and translated by Ervino Pocar), but falls victim to a hit-and-run driver (Thomas, 1935, p. 102).

Another fundamental theme of Fascist politics and ideology was the defence of Italianness. In a dialogue between two characters of Arnold Zweig's novel, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* [*The case of Sergeant Grischa*] (1927), Schieffenzahn warns Dr van Rijlte of the power of the Americans and, to be more convincing, compares the US Army to those of other countries, saying: 'Die Vereinigten Staaten seien weder mit Rumänien vergleichbar noch mit Italien'[13] (Zweig, 1927, p. 346). In the Italian translation of the novel (*La questione del sergente Grischa*, Mondadori 1930, translated by Enrico Burich), this sentence is rendered as: 'Gli Stati Uniti non possono essere paragonati alla Romania o alla Grecia' (Zweig, 1930, p. 194). To defend the image of Italy, in this case the translator Enrico Burich simply decided to shift the accusation to Greece, which apparently did not enjoy a good reputation in Italy as far as its military prowess was concerned.

Wide diffusion and the risk of emulation

Finally, I would like to consider the wide diffusion of German popular fiction as an important cause of a higher level of manipulation as compared to highbrow literature. In 1933, 35 contemporary German novels were published, followed by many other translations of texts by authors who were exiled and ostracized in Germany (Rubino, 2002, p. 91). Fiction was often serialized in magazines, and sold through newsstands. Popular novels were very accessible products, due to both their cheap price (the 'Romanzi della Palma' book series only cost 3 liras) and their availability. The centrality of the positive character, simple language and clear and linear narrative allowed readers to easily identify with the protagonists.

Serialized novels enjoyed an ever-growing success in magazines, and their very wide circulation made the messages they contained even more accessible to the audience; thence, they were more dangerous – and more censored – than politically involved novels that contained inadvisable themes, such as pacifism, but that were published in more expensive collections and were only available to a narrower segment of readers.

The straightforward structure of popular fiction, together with its candid narration of current events considered as burning issues, were a potential danger, which was only made worse by the wide circulation of these cheap literary products. So it was that novels presenting suicides, or women resorting to homemade abortion methods (Barrale, 2015), were seen as particularly dangerous by the censor due to the risk of emulation on the part of the readers.

After all, the parameters used to control translation were the same as those used to control the national press. Each newspaper received a list of crimes to which they should dedicate the least space possible; news about homicides, incest, suicides and so on should not be published, or at least not on the main page. The 'malcostume giornalistico' [journalistic malpractice] of dramatizing crime news was in danger of creating social alarm and spreading 'pericolosi germi' [dangerous germs] and 'criminose imitazioni'

[heinous imitations] in 'individui maldisposti' [ill-disposed individuals] (Cesari, 1978, p. 17). These norms caused absurd excesses, leading to prohibition of news about traffic or bad weather in Italy, in order not to cause alarm that might affect tourism (Ottaviani, 1999, p. 24).

More than the low cultural status assigned to popular fiction, it was the modernity of its themes and its widespread availability to strengthen both the intervention of the censor and the self-censoring practices of publishers and translators. The masses needed to be protected from such degenerate modernity, an evil capable of polluting and corrupting the moral health of the nation.

Self-censorship as the 'best' form of surveillance

Various self-censoring mechanisms were used by publishers during Fascism. The decision to publish a foreign novel in Italy was also based on an evaluation of the level of intervention needed to make it acceptable to the regime. In order to understand the editorial mechanisms behind such decisions, we have to analyse the very important role played by the so called 'pareri di lettura', the reading notes on the basis of which the publishers would protect themselves against the risk of censorship and confiscation. The reading notes were short evaluations of the text by translators, experts and other collaborators of the publishing house in which they provided an opinion on the advisability of translating and publishing the work. The collaborators of the publishing houses were asked to 'riassumere l'opera, valutare il pregio artistico e l'opportunità commerciale, esaminare i rischi politici e morali, suggerire tagli'[14] (Albonetti, 1994, p. 12). These reports – explains Albonetti in the introduction of his collection of reading notes written between 1929 and 1943 – were the means via which the publisher would approach the foreign work, the first filter through which a book could then reach its audience. Today, these kinds of documents are extremely valuable for research on translation during Fascism, since they reveal choices and decisions reflecting both the policy of the publisher and the literary taste of the time.

Interestingly, the reading notes show how a novel containing erotic elements, adultery or suicide was paradoxically considered more translatable than a text that, although not containing any immoral episodes, required more complex intervention from a stylistic or lexical point of view.

The dangerousness of the source text – considered as a whole – was then inversely proportional to its translatability: it was not possible to translate texts that were considered indecent or too bold on a linguistic level, but novels containing offensive episodes that could be expurgated despite their length could be easily revised and eventually published.

In the 'pareri di lettura', readers and advisors often provided editors with detailed recommendations on how to deal with potentially controversial passages. The following extracts, concerning the works cited above, exemplify, for instance, how readers for publishing houses reacted to passages dealing with abortion. Thus, Lavinia Mazzucchetti, a translator and scholar of German literature, commented on the attempts of the protagonist of *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* to have an abortion: 'Sarebbe facile tagliare una trentina o quarantina di pagine, abbreviando così anche nei particolari' (Mazzucchetti, n.d).[15] As we have already noted, most references to abortion were removed from the translation.

One anonymous reader is adamant in his or her advice concerning Gina Kaus's *Die Schwestern Kleh*:

> Data l'aria che spira quanto a censura dei costumi per la "Palma", direi che è meglio senz'altro rinunciare a prenderlo, giacché, per espellere suicidio, aborto e altre facezie, avremmo gravi complicazioni e non riusciremmo mai ad intonare l'opera al clima etico del nostro paese. (Anonymous, n.d., document n. 22)[16]

A second anonymous reader tentatively suggests publication could be attempted, though 'Sarebbero necessari tagli e mutamenti […] se si vogliono evitare scogli che conducono al naufragio di un sequestro',[17] concluding that 'Si può saltare il tentativo di liberarsi del nascituro, senza danno eccessivo per il libro' (Anonymous, n.d. document n. 18).[18]

A hand-written editorial note comments very eloquently: 'accidenti che guai!' (Anonymous, n.d. document n. 18).[19] Eventually, Mondadori decided to publish the novel, though the translation (by Ada Salvatore, published in 1934 with the title *Le sorelle Kleh*) was purged of all parts that might have caused problems; that is, both abortion attempts and the attempted suicide (for more details, see Barrale, 2015).

Conclusions

In this article I draw on historical research relating to translation and Fascism, the history of publishing, studies on censorship and self-censorship, as well as on my own analysis of the translated texts. By focusing on comparative textual analysis we can appreciate how self-censorship practices were adopted by publishers of New Objectivity literature in order to avoid direct intervention on the part of the regime's censors.

The analysis of German popular fiction translated into Italian suggests that popular literature was translated with a high degree of intervention. I have identified some of the factors responsible for heightening the critical attention of the censor towards the translation of German popular fiction: the low cultural status ascribed to this type of literature, the modernity of the themes it contained and its accessibility. While 'highbrow literature' catered to a niche readership, the wide circulation of popular literature made its messages accessible to a very large audience, and thus made it more dangerous and more subject to censorship compared to 'highbrow literature'. Publishers and translators adjusted their strategies accordingly, promoting a type of translation practice that could be defined as 'censor-oriented', in that it aimed at preventing any objections on the part of the censor.

When a dictatorial system succeeds in provoking self-censorship, making publishers, intellectuals, translators or writers – in a more or less explicit way – limit the boundaries of their own freedom of expression, it actually reaches a primary objective of control. The success of self-censorship is, indeed, the result of a controlling system (surveillance), which can create independent pressures that make the surveillance itself unnecessary. On the one hand, potential victims try to anticipate the censor's wishes; on the other, the regime indirectly contributes to creating a social consensus on what can or cannot be said (Morini, 2006, p. 121). Generating a form of self-control without leaving traces, in terms of laws or prohibitions, the evolution of censorship into self-censorship reflects a significant transformation from rules to norms; that is, from restrictions imposed from above to conditionings individually perceived by the translators, acquired from their surrounding context and applied to the texts they translate.

Notes

1. ['The invasion of foreigners']
2. [The average culture of the reader]
3. [We think it is essential for the literary autarky that three quarters of the foreign works which a few publishers are imposing, on the basis of that ancient, permanent, and insufficiently discredited Italian vice which we call xenophilia, be withdrawn from translation and publication. The consequence of this xenophilia is the denigration of Italian literary products; a denigration which is augmented by the ignoble diffusion of the most mediocre novels.]
4. [A disorganized and poisonous importation of doctrines, intellectual fashions, ways of thought, of art and of life […] that were entirely alien to the style and genius of the race. It is our constant effort, by now largely realized, to purify our native culture from this marginal pollution]. Discorsi del Ministro Pavolini, (undated) quoted by Rundle, 2010, p. 41.
5. I am referring here to dissident writers who fled abroad in 1933, such as Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Jakob Wassermann and Arnold and Stefan Zweig, whose works belong to the so-called 'Exilliteratur'.
6. It is true that, in one case, a renowned author complained about inappropriate changes to his texts. In 1923 Heinrich Mann brought action against Sonzogno, his Italian publisher, because of the inaccurate translations of two of his novels. Albonetti (1994, p. 30) described in detail the history of the 1919 publication of Mario Mariani's unauthorized translations of two novels by Heinrich Mann: *Der Untertan* (1918) and *Die Armen* (1917).
7. It is interesting to note that even when, at the end of the 1940s, Alberto Mondadori wanted to integrate the translation with its missing parts in order to print the complete version of the novel, the translator tried to convince the publisher that such a venture was not advisable. He even suggested that the author himself would have agreed to leave the text as it was, in order to keep the publication concise (Barrale, 2014).
8. [Enrico Burich substantially decreased the size of the novel (whose original we believe to be longer), but, even without having read the source text, we can affirm that this reduction has probably improved the text.]
9. [Since the Latin ear is more chaste and musical]
10. [Vulgar sincerities], [displayed intimacies], [certain expressions which were a bit harsh or brutal]
11. Examples of women's reading habits have been discussed by Bragaglia, 2000, p. 356, and Ghiazza, 1991, p. 140.
12. The interest of Italian readers in 'contemporary life' in Germany may also be gauged by the success of the journalistic reportages from Germany in the years after the First World War, and may be interpreted as evidence that post-war Germany, and most of all Berlin, were seen as a sort of huge laboratory for modernity (Rubino, 2002, pp. 12–40).
13. [The United States cannot be compared to Romania or Italy.]
14. [Summarizing the work, assessing artistic value and commercial opportunities, examining political and moral risks, suggesting cuts]
15. [It would be easy to cut some thirty of forty pages, thus also shortening the details.] The pareri di lettura are archived at the Fondazione Alberto e Arnoldo Mondadori in Milan. The manuscripts are often undated and unsigned, in which case they are identified by a number.
16. [Given the pressure being put on the 'Palma' (series) by the censorship, I would definitely suggest that we refrain from taking it, given that it would be very difficult to rid it of suicide, abortion and other pleasantries and we would never be able to bring the work in line with the moral climate of our country.]
17. [Cuts and changes would be needed […] if we want to avoid difficulties leading to a disastrous requisition.]
18. [The abortion attempt can be left out without much damage to the book.]
19. [Oh dear, what a problem!]

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