

Aesthetic Censorship?

Readers' Reports from Fascist Italy

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“The archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass [...]; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations” (Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* 129). Here Michel Foucault not only reflects upon the nature of the questions we are entitled – or not – to ask of an archive, but also enquires as to the consistency of the material culture stored therein. In this article we ask the same foucauldian questions to the readers' reports preserved in the archive of the biggest, and most active, Italian publishing house of the fascist period, the Milanese publisher Arnoldo Mondadori, in order to shed new light on the phenomenon of book censorship during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Censorship is, unquestionably, a repressive act exercised by a dominant subject over a subaltern one. However, it is equally true that censorial mechanisms operate according to the rules set by what Foucault has defined ‘Panopticon power.’ The Panopticon embodies a kind of power which is always both visible and invisible in its controlling of behaviour, desire and taste, “a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad” which “automatises and disindividualises power” (Foucault,

Discipline and Punish 201-202). Rather than being a set of prescriptions, then, Panopticism is “the general principle of a new ‘political anatomy’ whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 208). Hence Foucault argues that “even under repressive conditions knowledge can be produced, since censorship depends on the way in which the interplay of obstacles and signs organizes the modes of representation of the knowledge produced by the censored texts. Punishment and control, in fact, must act in such a way as to make the disciplinary sanction visible and invisible at the same time” (*Discipline and Punish* 177).¹

Censorship is, therefore, a multidimensional experience which depends on the potentially infinite multiplication of the interstitial spaces and perspectives emerging in the gaps between dominant and subaltern subjects. By understanding censorial mechanisms in terms of both bottom-up and top-down phenomena, it is possible to trace the shape that cultural landscapes assume under a dictatorship: that of a rhizome-like, postmodern labyrinth, where it is only when paths are crossed that new meanings are created. On a practical level, this article will assess the extent to which fascist institutional censorship had to accommodate and account for aesthetic demands from readers and publishers, in order to maintain the desired social, ideological and aesthetic status quo.

Between the two World Wars, the arrival of translations of foreign, especially British and American, popular narrative fiction impacted both on the organization of the publishing industry and on the editorial influence of readers, since the ‘aesthetics of the people’ became a powerful tool for counteracting repressive fascist censorship. If we accept the assumption that Italian totalitarianism was ‘imperfect,’ we can turn our attention to the phenomena which made it so; that is to say, to the presence of many alternative cultures, which lived a parallel life to those aesthetic configurations imposed by the dominant cultural and political system. In defiance of the official autarchy and in response to the public’s aesthetic demands, in effect, during the 1930s and 1940s, Italian culture kept its curiosity towards foreign traditions well alive.

1 For a wider discussion of different approaches to the study of censorship and translation, see Billiani, *Modes of Censorship and Translation*. For a discussion of Bourdieu’s statements on censorship and aesthetics, see Billiani, *Culture nazionali* (6-11) and Bourdieu.

Fascist censorship: negotiating between ideology and aesthetics

In response to the vast amount of translated fiction arriving in Italy in the 1930s, alarming public statements on the danger represented by potentially negative influence of foreign literature on Italian production started to appear in daily newspapers and journals alike (Billiani, *Culture nazionali* 149-207). In official terms: in order to stop this invasion, Italian culture and literature had to be presented to Italian readers as perfectly autonomous, and therefore immune to any form of contamination; to this end, in 1938 the regime launched a book seizure campaign to protect Italian citizens and readers. However, the story of the predictably harsh censorship exercised by the fascist regime dates back to long before this measure.²

Since 1922, in fact, fascist censorship had acted as a form of control of ideological, political or aesthetic expression, but it was formalised only in the mid-1930s, and the censors' paranoia started escalating with the 1938 'bonifica della cultura' ('campaign to sanitize culture'), and the promulgation of the racial laws (see Fabre, "Fascism, Censorship and Translation" 27-59, for a clear overview). All this, seen from the publishers' side, meant a process of *autobonifica*, self-sanitization or self-censorship, which grew more intense with the start of Italy's involvement in the war, and ever more so after 1941. In a nutshell, the visible side of censorship became more patent and explicit as the fall of the regime was approaching.

A circular communication of 3 April 1934 stipulated that publishers had to notify their intention of publishing foreign texts, and had to be given a preventive *nulla osta* (authorization), but there was no preventive control over the final proofs. In this way, there was no final control over what got written and published in the final version of the Italian translation. On 25 March 1938, another important circular, n° 11.35, stated that the publication of foreign literature had to be disciplined and controlled and proofs had to be read (Billiani, *Culture*

2 For a detailed overview of how book censorship operated, see Bonsaver; Fabre, *L'elenco*; Fabre, "Fascism, Censorship and Translation"; Rundle, "The Censorship of Translation"; Rundle, *The Permeable Police State*; Rundle, "Resisting Foreign Penetration"; and Talbot. Talbot in particular addresses the problem of censorship under the heading of what he terms 'common sense' (12-20), the decision-making power over censorial operation which everyday people and situations can exercise.

nazionali e narrazioni straniere 196-197).³ This institutional manoeuvre increased the visibility of the ‘foreign products’ on the market place which, because of their public exposure, now had to be removed. The *cause célèbre* of the day was that of the Milanese publisher Corticelli, which had twelve volumes sequestered, not to mention Arnoldo Mondadori himself, who also suffered from this pronouncement, having ten volumes sequestered.⁴ On 26 July 1940, the final decision about book censorship was taken: all translations published prior to the war were to be re-examined and if necessary removed from the market. From 1943 till the fall of the regime, censorship continued to exist but did not act as systematically as before (on this point, see Rundle “The Permeable Police State” 125-147).

Both the State archives of Rome and of Milan (Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma and Archivio di Stato di Milano) preserve the official traces of this painful and idiosyncratic process towards a totalitarian repression of foreign influences; publishers’ own personal archives – where the readers’ reports in question here are kept – also bear witness to this. By comparing the discourses emerging from these completely different sets of documents, one destined for official, the other for personal use, it will be possible to show how during the regime, beneath the surface, spaces of resistance came into being in which further aesthetic meaning and knowledge could be produced.

If we scrutinize the *veline* (authorizations) issued by the Ministry of Popular Culture⁵ and now kept in the State archive in Milan, the capital of the Italian publishing industry, we can map what I would like to call a thematic repertoire of censorship. Before 1938, prior to the publication of a translation, every Italian publisher had to send the Ministry both the original and its translation, whereas before it had merely been necessary to communicate the book’s titles either to the local prefect or to Mussolini himself (see Fabre, “Fascism, Censorship and Translation” 35). Regardless of this procedural change, throughout

3 Specifically, three copies had to be sent by the publisher to the Ministry, or the prefect, but these had to be the final translation, or the proofs (Billiani, *Culture nazionali* 197).

4 For a more detailed discussion of these issues as well as of the notion of ‘modernity’ as a way of avoiding censorship, see Billiani (*Culture nazionali* 196-207)

5 The Ministry of Popular Culture (Ministero della Cultura Popolare) was established on 27 May 1937 with the purpose of controlling popular culture.

the 1930s, Italian censors were concerned both to avoid any reference to immoral situations (adultery and suicide being the hottest topics) and to praise behaviour which exhibited high moral standards. To this end, the censor often invited translators to act in their capacity as cultural mediators, taking into careful consideration their debt and, especially, their moral debt towards their *italianità*, or else their sense of belonging to a given tradition and thus being part of a wider structure where foucauldian relations of discipline rather than sovereignty were in place. In practice, this meant that references to *pariginismo* (bohemian attitudes), a morally decadent atmosphere, any literary taste completely disengaged from reality (à la *Solaria*⁶), had to be avoided at all costs, as well as any remarks deemed offensive to allied nations, British novels in particular (specifically colonial British novels which supported their colonialism against that of Italy), representations of the female body (for example, labour pains), or, worst of all, any signs of an appreciation of communism.

Parallel to this scenario of official and codified censorial practices, publishers created alternative spaces of resistance, invisible meta-spaces which eventually undermined the totalitarian aesthetic control fascism wanted to exert over Italian readers. How did they achieve this? The ability of cultural agents and readers to resist censorship could be measured by the visibility of the aesthetic capital carried by the translated text. For, by publishing appealing translations, publishers could distinguish themselves and create alternative forms of control of the visible, which rested on the extremely powerful notion of ‘common aesthetic desire’ shared by vast numbers of readers. Indeed, in his preface to *The Renaissance* Walter Pater wrote: “To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics” (XXIX). Aesthetics, then, can be a powerful tool when placed not in an ivory tower, but in the context which generates it and gives it a meaning.

In many of his letters to Mussolini, or government officials, Arnoldo Mondadori, or one of his representatives, would link his social

6 A Florentine literary magazine of the 1930s with a print run of 700 copies which was sequestered in 1934 because of its generally dubious, decadent attitude towards the regime’s cultural policy.

role and persona as a publisher with those he embodied as a fascist citizen, thereby encapsulating one of the main distinctive traits of the Italian way to totalitarianism (see Gentile). By joining forces with Mussolini, the publisher challenges the power of censorship, since he becomes part of the Panopticon, a censorial mechanism of control always present in the agent's mind but never visible. For instance, on 5 July 1934, Mondadori wrote to the head of the Press Office of the Prime Minister (Ufficio stampa della Presidenza del Consiglio) and soon to become Minister of Popular Culture, Galeazzo Ciano:

Gentilissimo Conte,
[Feuchtwanger's *I Fratelli Oppenheim*] è, certo, un'opera d'arte, ma poiché l'argomento (la storia di una famiglia di ebrei nella Germania del 1932-1933) può facilmente suscitare nell'ordinario esaminatore qualche scrupolo, mi è sembrato opportuno sottoporre preventivamente questo libro ad un vaglio più autorevole, che possa meglio apprezzare la moderazione dell'artista e valutare, alla stregua di superiori direttive, l'opportunità alla pubblicazione. [...] Aggiungerò che l'Autore si è mostrato disposto a consentire quelle modificazioni del testo originale che saranno da noi ritenute necessarie; e sarà bene, infatti, alleggerire la crudezza di alcune espressioni, che contrastano col tono pacato di tutta la narrazione.

Se brevi romanzi come quello sopra accennato non possono essere pubblicati, se soprattutto si ritorna ad un periodo di rigore nei riguardi anche delle pubblicazioni di carattere popolare sulle quali noi ritenevamo di avere raggiunto una intesa con cotesto Ministero, io non so proprio che cosa devo fare. (Fondazione Arnoldo and Alberto Mondadori, FAAM, Fondo Arnoldo Mondadori, FAM, file. Minculpop, Milan, ds)

Dearest Count,
[Feuchtwanger's *I Fratelli Oppenheim*] is, undoubtedly, a work of art, but because its topic (the story of a Jewish family in Germany from 1932 to 1933) could easily provoke in the ordinary examiner certain reservations, I considered it appropriate to submit this book for a more authoritative assessment, which could better appreciate the artist's moderate touch, and, in response to directions from above, weight up its sustainability for publication. [...] I should like to add that the author has been quite willing to agree to those modifications of the original text, which will have deemed necessary; thus I would

recommend toning down the harshness of some expressions, which are in stark contrast with the overall moderate tone of the narration.

If short novels like the aforementioned cannot be published, and, in particular, if we are to go back to a period of extreme rigour regarding the publication even of popular novels – about which I believed we had reached an agreement with the Ministry – I really do not know what I am supposed to do.

The publisher elucidates the fundamental political and ethical principle according to which the individual citizen, here embodied by the publisher and the author, and the State needed to become a unity in which all the differences and discrepancies that had characterised their previous existences as separate instances had to be erased. Mondadori therefore presented himself to Ciano (and on many occasions to other officials) as capable of shaping a national textual body, which would facilitate forms of identification between readers and fascist citizens (see Billiani *Culture nazionali e narrazioni straniere* 192-193). Specifically, the publisher and the regime had to shape reciprocally and consensually those discursive practices which defined their national textuality. This should occur not only at the level of high art; but rather on that of popular culture. Moreover, it is argued, this censorial power de-individualises the text since it forces the author himself to self-sanitise his own work.

Since agreement between the publisher and the regime had to be reached over what kind of textuality could be safely and ‘profitably’ presented to the everyday reader – that is to say, on how ideology and aesthetics could enter into dialogue with each other when addressing the masses – it is crucial to take into account in turn both the in-house readers’ reports (often anonymous) which expressed a negative opinion on the publication of a given book and those which recommended the translation and publication of certain foreign titles.

In 1929, an anonymous reader articulated his negative view on the publication of the translation of Jardiel Poncela’s *Amor se escribe sin bache*:

[C]’è qualche originalità riuscita e qualche sprazzo umoristico non troppo di cattivo gusto. Però nessuna base – stile dell’immediato dopo-guerra. Evidente imitazione dello stile Pitigrilli, ma senz’altro inferiore. Personaggi freddi, che non vivono. Parlano, parlano, ma non sentono. Molti aforismi, che vogliono essere cerebrali. Quadro molto

convenzionale della vita cosmopolita. È troppo lungo e non conclude. Dal punto di vista morale, poco consigliabile da leggere, perché disgregatore di tutti quei concetti che noi preferiamo avere della morale. Sconsigliabile la traduzione in italiano. (FAAM. FAM, section Foreign Novels, File negative reports P-R, anonymous reader.)

[T]here is some kind of originality and a few sparks of humour that are not in overtly bad taste. However, there is no solid foundation – post-war style. A clear imitation of Pitigrilli's style, but markedly inferior. Characters are cold, they do not live. They talk, talk, but are unable to feel anything. Many aphorisms, which are trying to be cerebral. Very conventional picture of cosmopolitan life. It is too long and has no conclusion. From a moral point of view, not really to be recommended, since it challenges all those moral concepts we hold dear. Not to be translated into Italian.

Enrique Jardiel Poncela was a Spanish playwright and novelist, an *émigré* to Hollywood, internationally famous mostly for his humorous stories. Significantly, the decision not to publish this novel had less to do with its supposedly loose morals than with the dated style of the narrative itself, deemed inadequate to the demands of a modern readership. Poncela certainly does not, or otherwise badly, imitate the style of a best-selling, yet controversial, Italian author, Pitigrilli, pen-name of the half-Jewish Dino Segre.⁷ In the late 1910s, the 1920s, and early 1930s, Pitigrilli had risen to literary stardom with titles of very little aesthetic quality, but with huge appeal to the reader precisely for their humour and their far from subtle scandalous overtones. There is no direct foucauldian 'punishment' for the book in this instance, since what matters most is the way in which aesthetics are organised within an institution: the right to punish is neither advocated by the regime nor the publisher but by the reader since "[a] power to punish that ran the whole length of the social network would act at each of its points, and in the end would no longer be perceived as a power of certain individuals over others" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 130).

A year later, we see another rejection of a novel by the same author, but the reasons, this time, seem slightly different:

⁷ For more details on the controversial figure of Dino Segre, see Talbot (95, 157), in particular for the allegations of his collaboration with the OVRA, the fascist secret police.

Il romanzo è divertente. È assurdo, pazzesco, ha situazioni incredibili ed è scritto in uno stile alquanto futurista. [...] Libro che può senz'altro piacere al gran pubblico. Forse un po' troppo ardito per quanto riguarda la morale. Bisognerebbe, traducendolo, farvi degli opportuni tagli. Ma naturalmente essendo la parte immorale più curata e più divertente, bisognerebbe sostituirla con qualcosa di pulito sì, ma umoristico. Il quadro della Spagna moderna è abbastanza interessante. (FAAM. FAM, section Foreign Novels, File negative reports P-R, *!Espérame en Siberia, vida mía!*, anonymous reader)

This novel is amusing. It is absurd, crazy, with unbelievable situations and it is written in a sort of futurist style. [...] Readers will love it. Perhaps, a little too audacious as far as morality is concerned. We need to cut it appropriately in translation. Naturally though, since the immoral part is the book's most more polished and entertaining aspect, we should swap it for something clean, but funny. The portrayal of contemporary Spain is quite interesting.

Mutatis mutandis, although morally unsound, being stylistically daring and innovative, the book could be considered more carefully for publication. Indeed, this novel seems to have all it takes: it is experimental, futurist (à la Filippo Tomaso Marinetti), and entertaining in such a way as to be of interest to a large audience (see Fabre, "Fascism, Censorship and Translation" 28-30 on Marinetti's involvement in the campaign against translations). Its 'message' is, however, not always morally acceptable according to the official regulations prescribed by the regime. So, to get around this problem, the most obvious and natural solution would be to make 'appropriate cuts.' But since the 'immoral part,' even for sanitised fascist readers, remains the most appealing, it must be replaced with something equally captivating and funny in the target text. In the end, the book would not be translated – this would have involved too much work – but this is an extremely illuminating example of how publishers perceived aesthetics as a counter-power to that imposed on them by institutions and felt free to rise to the occasion and manipulate them. In fact, the panoptic schema "was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalised function" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 207).

Similarly, in another report, this time on the famous German author Erich Maria Remarque, we read some more explicit comments about the dangerous mechanisms involved in censorship:

Venendo a quelli che sono pericoli, diciamo così, ancor più concreti per una censura anche miope, dirò che la moralità è altissima se concepita da un punto di vista non borghese e non familiare, ma tale da suscitare molto scandalo se vista con criteri di ipocrisia ortodossa. Robby, il bravo protagonista, vive in grande dimestichezza col Café International, ritrovo di donne da strada, e queste sue buone amiche vivono la loro professione con una naturalezza perfetta. Naturalmente, in confronto alle signorine di Marisa Ferro o alle dame romane di Moravia, son tutte brave lavoratrici rispettabilissime e simpaticissime, aspetti sociali che suscitano al più pietà ma nessun disgusto, nella loro modesta miseria e apatia, e il libro è proprio il contrario di un libro “eccitante” e sconveniente...ma sappiamo come la censura sia rimasta al criterio che non sia lecito parlare di “quelle signore,” sia pure per commuoversi sull’amor materno di una Rosa, che d’altra parte si lascia con gioia sfruttare e picchiare da un losco lenone. [...]

Lo almeno non posso credere che Remarque possa aderire ad una “espurgazione” della sua opera che la rovinerebbe artisticamente in modo indicibile, riducendola ad un romanzetto amoroso fra il reduce scalcinato e disordinato e la signorina decaduta. [...]

Data la discrezione esteriore dell’autore, che evita nomi, precisazioni ecc. certo il libro entrerà in Italia in massa attraverso al francese. È da vedere se la nostra censura, per non fare un favore finanziario ai librai francesi, preferirà chiudere un occhio. Ma non mi pare probabile, dato il nome troppo celebre di Remarque.

La tecnica del romanzo è troppo buona in R. perché si possano far ‘tagli’: tutto è ingranato e addentellato in modo che...dovrebbe l’autore stesso castrare e mutare, facendo le necessarie suture. *Nessun* traduttore può farlo, dato anche il tono personalissimo del suo stile. (FAAM. FAM, section Foreign Novels, File negative reports P-R, E. *Three Comrades*, 1937, anonymous reader)

Considering what might turn out to be, shall we say, even more concrete dangers facing a censorial board – even a short-sighted one – I note that the book’s moral standards are very high, if they are not understood from a middle-class or family-oriented point of view, while very scandalous indeed, if we view the story according to the criterion of orthodox and hypocrisy. Robby, the book’s upstanding

protagonist is on very familiar terms with the Café International, a gathering for prostitutes, and these very good friends of his carry on their profession in a perfectly natural manner. Naturally, compared to Marisa Ferro's girls or Moravia's roman ladies, they are all good, respectable and pleasant workers, since, in their modest misery and apathy, these social insights can provoke pity at most, but certainly not disgust; this book is the exact opposite an exciting and unseemly... but we all know that censorship is still stuck with the idea that you can not mention 'those ladies,' not even to sympathise with Rosa's maternal love, for example, a woman who willingly allows a dodgy pimp to exploit her and beat her up.

I cannot foresee Remarque even considering having his novel expurgated. This would cause unspeakable damage to his work, reducing it to a shallow romance between a shabby, dissolute ex-serviceman and a fallen woman. [...]

Given the author's discretion in avoiding names and identifiable details, the book will surely enter Italy en masse via its French version. It still remains to whether our censorship, in order to avoid doing a financial favour to French booksellers, will prefer to turn a blind eye. However, this scenario is highly unlikely, given Remarque's fame. [...]

R.'s technique is too good for us to 'cut': everything is engineered and connected in such a way that only the author himself would be able to chop and change, making the necessary amendments. *No* translator could do that, also given his highly personal style.

Like in the previous examples of negative reports, once again the level of 'danger' can be assessed by comparing the book with similar Italian novels, such as those by the controversial Alberto Moravia. In this report, two major issues concerning book production and censorship during the fascist period are flagged up: the role of the author in authorising cuts and the unavoidable competition with French translations. On the one hand, Remarque's style, because of its great literary quality, cannot be modified by the Italian translator. On the other hand, it is the censorship board that needs to decide whether this book can be allowed into the country or not, since there is almost inevitably a high risk not only that it might arrive anyway, but worse, that it might do so via its French translation. Either way, the arguments of both ideology and aesthetics could potentially be dismissed when the potential profit would go not to the Italian publishing industry, but to French publishers.

It is clear from these negative examples that the criteria for blocking or publishing a translation were far from straightforward.

No less revealing of the mechanisms of fascist censorship are the positive reports, since they can provide us with the reasons why a book could be welcomed into the country. The anonymous reviewer of *The Water Gypsies* (1931) by the British writer and politician A.P. Herbert wrote to this effect:

Invero il libro è ameno, i tipi sono svariati e naturali. Gli ambienti ben descritti. Ben trovato il tipo di Jane, dalla fantasia scaldata dai films secondo i quali vorrebbe informare la sua vita. [...] In tutto il libro c'è quel tanto di libertà di linguaggio e di immoralità che piace al gran pubblico, lo solletica, ma c'è anche in fondo la salda onestà del popolo. (FAAM. FAM, section Foreign Novels, File positive reports, anonymous reader).

The book is entertaining; the characters are varied and natural. The backgrounds well portrayed. Jane is a fascinating character, with her imagination fired up by the films upon which she would model her life. [...] Throughout the book, there is enough freedom of language and even immorality to interest and titillate most readers. But there is also the deep-seated honesty of the people.

Despite its portrayal of a modern girl, with a totally different attitude towards life than that expected by the regime, the degree of moral 'liberty' is tolerable, in 1931, since it is a guarantee of good sales. Moreover, the novel is marketable and passable (before the censors), because it combines the solid morals of the everyday person with the slightly edgy and modern attitude of the female protagonist. Such a book could, and would, pass the censors with its cautious mix of 'permissible and forbidden,' visible and invisible. As Foucault wrote, a body becomes useful when it is both free and controlled, since this is the only way it can be placed within a given social formation (*Discipline and Punish* 25-26). This necessity becomes even more obvious during a dictatorship, when in theory only the subdued body should be allowed to survive. Conversely, the body of foreign fiction had to be at one and the same time let free to circulate on the market and subdued to censorial power.

In a memorandum about the bestselling series “La Palma,” the twofold rationale for the publication of a popular 1940 British novel *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands* by Gerald Butler is explained: “Questo libro è palpitante di vita, avvincente, suggestivo, suscita nel lettore grande emozione, per la vivacità del dialogo e l'immediatezza della descrizione. Ne risulterebbe una Palma un po'...violenta, in simpatico contrasto con quella un po' troppo sdolcinata.” (FAAM. FAM, File positive reports, Bruna Magnani). “This book is full of life, captivating, suggestive, it provokes a great emotional upheaval in the reader because of its lively dialogue and its vivid descriptions. It would make a rather violent Palma...in pleasant contrast with the other one which is a little too sentimental.”

Yet again, despite as well as because of its potentially subversive morals, the publisher has to act as a pseudo-censor, using aesthetic judgment as a tool to direct the censor's potential ideological judgment. The Panopticon is a form of control that is not limited to official sites but pervades all social spaces (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 208). This same task of enabling the Panopticon to function pertains to the translator too, as we read in the report of another bestselling British novelist, Rosamond Lehmann, later in life a Commander of the British Empire for her services to literature:

Se si aggiunge che il traduttore italiano ha soppresso o attenuato i passaggi che potevano sembrare un po' crudi o prestarsi a errate interpretazioni, si deve concludere che non solo può portare pregiudizio morale o sociale, o costituire un cattivo esempio, ma *Tempo d'amore* che forse, anziché in una collezione da pubblico ristretto e difficile come “Medusa,” dovrebbe esser pubblicato, ad ammonimento, in una collezione più popolare. (FAAM. FAM, section Foreign Novels, File positive reports, *Tempo d'amore* (*The Weather in the Streets*), 1936, anonymous reader)

If we add that the Italian translator has suppressed or toned down the passages which could have seemed to be a little too direct or subject to mistaken interpretations, we must conclude that *The Weather in the Streets* might not lead to moral or social prejudice, or even set a bad example, but should even, for this reason, perhaps, be published not in a series for a limited, specialist readership, but rather issued as a warning, in a more popular series.

The Weather in the Street is the third instalment in a series of novels which tell the story of the author's unhappy marriage and her extra-marital affairs. Given the extremely sensitive topic – the life of an unfaithful and promiscuous lady of the 1930s – the rhetoric adopted in the report is extremely interesting. It uses the allegedly 'bad' moral message put forward by the foreign novel both as a *memento mori* for the fascist female reader and as a means of fulfilling the market's demands for slightly "leading edge" material. Once we accept another foucauldian principle that "[t]he asylum reduces differences, represses vice, eliminates irregularities," the morally loose content of foreign fiction can even, paradoxically, be used in favour of translations when presented to the censor, especially if the story is not set in Italy but in some foreign corrupted country (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 225). Even a foreign book can be used to guide potentially liberated wives towards a more moderate lifestyle.

Censorship becomes a key power in that it establishes automatic practices but it de-individualises control by constantly deferring the meaning of those very practices. The *modus operandi* of the official censorship of translations, if in force at the juncture between different powers (both institutional and institutionalised), does not act simply according to the logic of punishment, but according to the principle of correction. Censorship is therefore not only a punitive act, but permeates a much broader discourse on power structures, affecting both the public and the private spheres in their ideological, aesthetic and textual dimensions. Thus we can understand why propaganda against and censorship of translations subscribe precisely to the assumption that foreign texts can be formally legitimised, or de-legitimised, if forced within the parameters of the current patterns of taste.

As pointed out by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, the successful outcome of disciplinary power derives from the use of simple tools which he identifies in hierarchical control and normalising sanction, and their co-existence in the practice of examination (187). In all these texts, fragments of a foucauldian postmodern archive, censorship becomes a means of establishing a given cultural authority, which organises reading patterns by exercising the power of punishment and the right of surveillance; or, more generally, it educates citizens in a new conceptualisation of the fundamental values of their existence.

Although hierarchical control and normalising sanction, with their rationalising authority over both power and knowledge, become more and more pressing towards the end of the regime and in the middle of World War II, the real exam, expressed by a visible power, the formulation of codes and the creation of a special case remain controversial procedures, which, depending upon institutional powers and the specific characteristic of the national textuality, allows gaps of resistance and difference.

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Summary

This article discusses the complex and ambivalent nature of book censorship of translations in Italy during the fascist period, from the point of view of the publishing industry. By not understanding censorship as a merely top-down phenomenon and by adopting Michel Foucault's notion of Panopticism, it assesses the extent to which readers' demands and aesthetic preferences from 'below' could influence the censor's final decision on what to publish. To this end, this article draws on unpublished primary material, such as the readers' reports of the day, held in the archive of the biggest publishing house of the day, the Milanese Arnoldo Mondadori.

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