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The Success of US Literature in Italy During Fascism

Ambivalent Censorship, Market, and Consensus

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Abstract

This essay explores the manifold and intermixed ways through which fascist censorship dealt with one of the most remunerative yet problematic literary fields on the Italian book market: US literature. In particular, the purpose here is to demonstrate that the permissiveness that characterizes the fascist management of US literature unveils a subtle and sly attempt to manipulate US books to make them compatible with the fascist national ideology, conversely lightening their subversive and critical potential towards Italy. The article is structured in two parts: the first examines the ambivalent perception of the US in Italy during fascism and its correlation to the national circulation of US literature. By resorting to some significant episodes of book censorship in the translations of Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese, and Eugenio Montale, the second part demonstrates how the authorities' interventions on US books can be interpreted as attempts to adapt US culture and literature to respond to the urgencies of Mussolini's regime. In particular, the censorial interference dictated the elimination of references to Italy to prevent the Italian readers' exposure to critical perspectives on the country that could excoriate the national image that fascism was struggling to build. The two sections intersect a quantitative overview of the circulation of US books in Italy and a qualitative analysis of how censorship evaluated books and induced their manipulation via translation.

KEYWORDS

US literature, Fascism, Censorship, Italy, United States

The translation and circulation of US literature in Italy in the 1930s and early 1940s provides a useful case study for observing the different ways in which Italian fascist censorship operated, and the modes the regime used to control content while maintaining an outward appearance of liberalism. This article attends in particular to the censorial interference that dictated the elimination of references to Italy in US publications to prevent Italian readers' exposure to critical perspectives on the country that could excoriate the national image that fascism was struggling to build.

The article is split into two sections: the first consists of a quantitative overview of the circulation of US books in Italy, drilling down into the data in Christopher Rundle's survey (2019) of Italian translations of foreign literature to focus specifically on US texts; the second provides a textual analysis of how translators manipulated texts by neutralizing minimal elements identified as likely to instigate heavier censorial countermeasures if left unchecked. The slightness of these censorial interventions reflects the regime's efforts to disguise its book control, lest this undermines its professed commitment to the liberal supply of cultural goods. The wealth of US literature, especially prose-fiction, translated into Italian in this period in turn reflects the extent to which these works were seen as a cultural reservoir vital to the broader functionalizing of US culture in the service of the regime. Indeed, several studies have suggested that despite the regime's political and cultural opposition to the United States, the circulation of US books was not dramatically affected in the various phases and transformations of the fascist censorial apparatus.

The second part of this article in turn examines three especially significant instances of censorship and self-censorship in the translation of US texts: Elio Vittorini's translation of John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935), Eugenio Montale's translation of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936), and Cesare

Pavese's translation of John Dos Passos' *The Big Money* (1933).[1] On the one hand, these three cases exemplify a minimalist, preemptive, self-censorial approach (involving, namely, the elimination of references to Italy) intended to protect the marketability of US literature in Italy and render unnecessary further interventions by the authorities (see Fortunato 31). On the other hand, they show the variety and complexity of approaches that characterized the fascist censorship of literary texts. By combining a quantitative observation of Italian translations of US books in the interwar period with the qualitative analysis of the above-named translated US books, this article thus provides a preliminary account of the circulation of US literature under fascism and contextualizes the apparent ambivalence of the regime's dealings with US books and how that related, in turn, to the publishing industry's aspirations to preserve, and define, high literature in the face of massification and competing influences from abroad.

Here, some background regarding Italian publishing is necessary to clarify the unique parameters in which the selection and translation of the texts in question were occurring. Since its inception in the 1500s, Italian publishing has been shaped by the concept of the *collana*, or series – a constellation of texts selected by the editors based on a common theme such as literary style, genre, or author's nationality (see Ferretti and Iannuzzi). Beginning in the early nineteenth century, however, as the ideological vision of the editor played an increasingly prominent role in their curation, the *collane* came to reflect a particular set of political ideals or, more interestingly for our purposes, the editor's idea of what constitutes "good" literature and what role such literature should play in influencing the public imagination and the Italian world of letters (see Ferretti). This ideological vision was reflected in the individual *collane*'s mission statements, generally reproduced in the frontmatter of each volume, and in the editor's expansive introductions, whose historical and thematic contextualization of the individual works also dictated the lens through which they should be interpreted. The first instances of this modern iteration of the *collana* was Giovan Battista Sonzogno's "Collane

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[1] All quotes from the original sources are taken from their first edition; all quotes in Italian are taken from their first Italian edition.

degli Antichi Storici Greci Volgarizzati," launched in 1819, of Ancient Greek classics translated into vulgate (modern) Italian and dedicated "ai Giovani Italiani" ("to Italy's youth"), and Felice Le Monnier's "Biblioteca Nazionale" ("National Library"), launched in 1843, which presented the emergent middle classes with a unified, patriotic, vision of Italian literary "excellence" spanning literary periods and genres (see Ferretti; Marchi and Cammarano). By the early twentieth century, the *collana* was playing an important role in both appealing to, and shaping the tastes of, specific audience groups, often with a view to "elevating" and "illuminating" the masses – a project complicated upon the fascist regime's rise to power. More specifically, a keen awareness that the *collane* editors' priorities did not necessarily align with the regime saw the latter scrutinize the titles the former selected and the introductions they wrote or commissioned. However, the regime also recognized the value of the *collane* as vessels for projecting an image of the nation as refined, cultured, and alive to shifting intellectual currents and the changing sensibilities of the international literary scene.[2] In this context, the impetus behind publishing US literature had to do, as well, with communicating a very specific vision of US culture, US literature, and the unique contours of American modernity. The term "series," then, refers specifically to these *collane*.

The fascist regime's shaping of Italian national culture has been examined from a range of perspectives since it first became a subject of scholarly enquiry in the 1960s.[3] Starting from the work of Renzo De Felice,

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[2] Notably, though well-known editors such as Gian Dàuli and successful writers and poets such as Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese, and Eugenio Montale edited many of the *collane* featuring translations of US texts in this period, editors who were less known to the public but highly respected within the industry such as Lavinia Mazzucchetti, Alessandra Scalero, and Maria Martone also played a pivotal role, usually behind the scenes, in championing the translation and publication of US texts.

[3] Several studies identify a combination of coercion and thought control in the fascist policies, exerted through the "development and the spreading – in an active or in a passive way – of a discourse containing the elements that legitimize the exercise of power" (Nelis 142), aimed to tailor a fascist sense of nationhood (see Cavazza). For example, Emilio Gentile observes the formation of a national ideology clothed in a religious discourse by sacralizing the cult of *Romanità* (1993). Others explored the construction of aesthetic consensus in the field of architecture (Ghirardo, "City and Theater"; "Architects, Exhibi-

fascism has been analyzed in light of its attempt to strengthen popular consensus by constructing a hegemonic culture.[4] The last two decades have in turn seen a thorough scrutiny of the contradictory relationship between the circulation of foreign literature in translation in Italy under fascism and the regime's aggressive promotion of the production of national literature and fierce opposition to the importation of books written by foreign authors. Among the several *dispositifs* that operated in this way,[5] censorship exemplifies the insidious combination of coercion and collaboration. George Talbot and Guido Bonsaver argue that fascist censorship should not be considered as an all-pervasive, tightly coordinated, monolithic form of repression (Bonsaver, *Censorship* 5; Talbot, *Censorship* 7), but rather as a combination of different approaches, policies, and standards. Talbot distinguishes three types of censorial practices: "preventive censorship," which operates as a repressive instrument for the protection of national and military intel; "informative censorship," which designates the examination and control of "everything written by the military and civilian population" (14) to keep abreast of popular feelings; and "productive censorship," consisting of "the construction of positive messages" related to the regime and to what the institutions deemed as acceptable for the Italian audience and how they made it available (15). According to Bonsaver, just as the fascist regime was a vast container within which several visions cohabited, so was censorship "a tool that was taken up and used in many different ways, by different agents, and with different results" (*Censorship* 261).[6]

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tions"; Falasca-Zamponi), literature and other arts (Ben-Ghiat; Burdett; Cioli; Bonsaver, *America in Italian Culture*).

[4] See De Felice; Berezin. As Jan Nelis has it: the regime pursued this aim by obtaining "a certain degree of popular consensus [that] relied not only on coercion, but also on active as well as passive indoctrination" (142).

[5] In Foucauldian terms, this expression configures fascist censorship as an institution that is part of the apparatus – "a system of relations" established among "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions" – whose purpose is to maintain the exercise of power (Foucault, "Confession of the Flesh" 195).

[6] In two decades, fascist censorship underwent a transition from a sub-secretariat to a full-fledged ministry, ruled by different heads (Galeazzo Ciano, Alessandro Pavolini, or Gaetano Polverelli) and constantly overshadowed by Mussolini. See Bonsaver, *Mussolini*

While the censorial measures applied to the nation's cultural outputs varied depending on the medium in question, within publishing, productive censorship was the most prominent.[7] In his analysis of travel writing published during fascism, Charles Burdett hints at the function of censorship as an instrument not only for regulating the Italian culture industry but also for redirecting popular consensus towards certain cultural initiatives and away from those deemed incompatible with the dominant culture. Burdett is skeptical of a totalitarian and restrictive conception of censorship under fascism and highlights its role in consolidating consensus by adapting the circulation of cultural products to the regime's precepts rather than by preventively intervening at the source. In this sense, Burdett underlines the "essential syncretism" of the fascist doctrine as he acknowledges "the facility with which it incorporated seemingly contradictory elements within the broadest confines of its ideology as well as its ability to mean different things over time to different people" (6). This account is borne out by the fact that the number of foreign texts published under the regime is disproportionately larger than that of the number of books banned without appeal: very often, books merely underwent a process of "adjustment" or what could be called "forced localization."[8] More specifically, the common practice, in translating, of "localizing" or adapting the text to the cultural context extended, here, to preemptively eliminating offending elements. Publishers and translators frequently chose to censure their own work to preempt the demands of the regime and dodge more repressive censorial interferences (Fortunato 32).

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censore; Fabre, *L'elenco*; Ferrando.

[7] See Berezin; Talbot, *Censorship in Fascist Italy*; Venturini. Bonsaver further notes that preventive censorship was avoided (only occasionally were book stocks confiscated) in order not to penalize the publishers' margin of profit and maintain an active dialogue with them (*Censorship* 43).

[8] My thanks to editor Elisa Pesce for suggesting the term "forced localization" to extend an understanding of localization as a process that, in Vera Mityagina and Irina Volkova's words, "centr[es] recipients and the task of creating such a text that would meet their pragmatic expectations and preserve its communicative functions" (2) to encompass the obligation to adapt the text to the political exigencies of the local market.

From these analyses, then, censorship emerges as less intent on locking *out* cultural products than on controlling their circulation via a sophisticated system of curation, verification, and manipulation.[9] Considering the material impossibility and ideological inconvenience of applying a totalitarian model to censorship, the laxity of fascist censorial practices can be interpreted as part of a wider approach intended to filter cultural products and domesticate their disruptive elements to suit the fascist dicta.

Ambivalent Censorship: The Invasion of US Literature During Fascism

The contradictions outlined above broadly apply to the context of all translated literature, yet they are particularly evident in the case of US literature published in Italy during the fascist era, and in the vulgate belief (also popular in the postwar period) that fascist authorities fiercely impeded the circulation of Italian translations of US books – a view questioned by Arturo Cattaneo and the above-mentioned study by Rundle, which suggests the Italian literary market's receptiveness to US literature in the interwar period despite the regime's promotion of cultural autarchy (Cattaneo 17; Rundle, *Il vizio* 48). Rundle describes this contradiction as a "peculiarly Fascist ambivalence" characterized by the aperture of a "clear gap […] between […] rhetoric and […] concrete action" ("The Censorship" 41).

This ambivalence reflects the Italian fascists' broader perception of the United States and their approach to book censorship. Noting the regime's concomitant appreciation of and aversion to US society's incarnation of the spirit of modernity, Emilio Gentile argues that the fascist depiction of the US was "neither uniform nor static" and "developed from a nucleus of common stereotypes, through different and even contrasting images, in which positive and negative judgements on American politics, culture,

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[9] For accounts of the productive censorship of Italian texts, see Bonsaver, "Fascist Censorship on Literature"; Talbot. For an account of the productive censorship of foreign texts, see Rundle, "The Censorship of Translations."

society and customs were to be found side by side or mixed together" ("Impending" 8). Bonsaver likewise identifies Mussolini's "ambivalent mixture of fascination and reproach" to the US as "characteri[stic of] the outlook of the European educated elite during the interwar years" (*America* 219). These included several Italian intellectuals more or less overtly aligned with the regime, such as Margherita Sarfatti, Gian Gaspare Napolitano, Luigi Barzini, and Emilio Cecchi. The publication of nearly 70 books on the US between 1922 to 1943 demonstrates the fascist interest in the "American myth" even as the ideological and political distance between the two countries grew.[10]

The elements of ambivalence detected by Bonsaver in the fascist regime's overall reception of US culture also characterized the censorship of translations of US works of literature. The most famous example of this is the saga of the publication of Elio Vittorini's literary anthology, *Americana* (1942), whose publication the Italian Minister of Popular Culture Alessandro Pavolini initially rejected, citing the increasing likelihood of the US joining the conflict on the opposing side (Bonsaver, *Censorship* 221-30; Turi 53-60; C. Pavese 13-18; see also Esposito 122). Though the fascist minister was unequivocal that the anthology was "highly commendable for both its content and presentation," he noted that publishing it risked "add[ing] more impetus to the fashion for contemporary American literature: a fashion that I am determined not to encourage" (qtd. in Bonsaver, *Censorship* 227). Now, he noted, was "not the time to do the Americans any favours, not even literary ones" (227).[11] Pavolini eventually

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[10] Some examples: Francesco Ciarlantini's *Incontro col Nord-America* (1929) and *Al paese delle stelle. Dall'Atlantico al Pacifico* (1931), Fausto Maria Martini's *Si sbarca a New York* (1930), Mario Soldati's *America primo amore* (1935), Giuseppe Antonio Borgese's *Atlante americano* (1936), Margherita Sarfatti's *L'America, ricerca della felicità* (1937), Luigi Barzini jr's *O America!* (1938), and Emilio Cecchi's *America amara* (1939).

[11] Translated by Bonsaver. The original letter reads: "L'opera è assai pregevole per il criterio critico della scelta e dell'informazione e per tutta la presentazione. Resto però del mio parere, e cioè che l'uscita – in questo momento – dell'antologia americana non sia opportuna […]. Non è il momento di fare delle cortesie all'America, nemmeno letterarie. Inoltre l'antologia non farebbe che rinfocolare la ventata di eccessivo entusiasmo per l'ultima letteratura americana: moda che sono risoluto a non incoraggiare." It is worth

approved *Americana*'s publication in March 1942 after Bompiani replaced Vittorini's original "Corsivi" – a selection of introductory texts, each of which was to preface a different section of the anthology, and which Pavolini deemed too admiring of US literature and culture – with a single introduction commissioned to the literary critic Emilio Cecchi that cast the texts in a more critical light.[12] The fact that the selection of texts in *Americana* remained untouched would suggest that whatever problems fascism had with the anthology, they did not involve US literature per se, but rather with Vittorini's literary views and with how US literature, and the United States more generally, was presented to Italian audiences.

A similar ambivalence is evidenced by *Americana*'s inclusion of an excerpt from Gertrude Stein's story "Melanctha" (published in *Three Lives*) – a decision that went unchallenged despite its contravention of the racial laws the regime had instituted in 1938 to restrict the circulation of works by Jewish authors (Fabre, *L'Elenco* 14). The excerpt's acceptance followed Einaudi's publication of Cesare Pavese's translations of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Three Lives* (1909), in 1938 just before the laws came into effect and 1940 respectively, neither of which was censored (Dunnett 105). The fact that the presence of Jewish writers played no part in the most famous episode of fascist censorship of US literature illustrates the complexity of the regime's multilayered policies and approaches to the issue.

The editorial catalogs of the main publishers of the interwar period in turn demonstrate that despite the regime's various efforts to dampen public interest in it, the circulation of US literature in Italy under fascism increased. The figures Rundle provides for the annual number

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noting that "add more impetus" is Bonsaver's translation of Pavolini's "rinfocolare la ventata," which is more accurately translated as "fan the flame – a formulation that frames pro-American sentiment as a dangerous and potentially uncontainable force warranting careful management, and that Bompiani would later echo in his suggestion that replacing Vittorini's enthusiastic introductions to each section with a single, more critical one, one would help "throw water on the fire" (*Censorship* 227).

[12] Qtd. in D'Ina and Zaccaria 43, my translation. To clarify, "corsivi" is the term that Vittorini used to describe his introductory texts, and it was later adopted by literary critics who analyzed *Americana*.

of translations published in Italy in this period certainly substantiate Pavese's notorious description of the interwar period as "Il decennio delle traduzioni" (the decade of translations): of the 13.500 translations of literary works published between 1926 and 1941, 2.500 – nearly 20% – were translations from English, the majority of which from Britain and the US (*Il vizio* 53; 58-59).

As Rundle does not distinguish between books by British and US authors, an analysis of the catalogs of the most active publishers may help quantify the pervasiveness of US literature in translation. In variable amounts, US fiction was included in the catalogs of most of the Italian publishers of the time, either in book series entirely devoted to foreign literature or ones that featured Italian texts as well. However, the extent of their presence was not consistent across the Italian national literary market. For example, of the 55 titles in Einaudi's "Narratori stranieri tradotti" (1938-1962), edited by Pavese and Natalia Ginzburg, only four (7%) were American: Gertrude Stein's *Tre esistenze* (1940), Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1940) and *Pierre o delle ambiguità* (1941), and Henry James' *Ritratto di signora* (1942). Similarly, after Mussolini came to power in 1922, Carabba's "Antichi e moderni" (1912-1935) included only two books by US authors: Washington Irving's *Vita di Maometto* (1928) and Francis Bret Harte's *Gabriele Conroy* (1932). The paucity of US titles in these series indicates that the market for US literature was highly uneven.

US literature's expanding presence in literary series in this period is illustrated by the number of US titles in three series published by Corbaccio between 1929 and 1943: "Modernissima" (1928-1932), "Corbaccio" (1932-1943), and "I corvi" (1933-1939). The first of these, "Modernissima," comprised 19 works, 4 of which were American – including Thornton Wilder's *Il ponte di San Luis Rey* (1929) and Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* (1930). "Corbaccio" listed 43 titles, the majority of which were British but 5 of which were American and included John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1932). Of the 100 titles in "I corvi," 39 were Italian, and three were American: Joseph Hergesheimer's *Lo scialle di Manilla* (1933), Jack London's *Il richiamo della foresta* (1936), and Mark Twain's *Le avventure di Tom Sawyer* (1938).

The proportion of translated US texts in Bompiani's series also reflects

this increase. Of the 35 titles published in its first decade (1930 to 1940), which corresponded to one-third of the series, in "Letteraria," Bompiani's foreign literature series, eleven were translations of US books.[13] Of the thirteen in "I libri d'acciaio" (1930-1935), a series for young readers, three were American: *Io conquisto nuovi mondi* (1930) by Richard Halliburton, *La pepita d'oro* (1934) by Julius King, and *Ricordi di un piccolo pellirosse* (1934) by Charles Alexander Eastman Ohiyesa.

The growing presence of US literature in the Italian book market in this period is further attested by Sonzogno and Mondadori's catalogs. One of the largest publishers in Milan at the turn of the twentieth century, and as mentioned earlier the originator, in 1819, of the modern *collana*, Sonzogno was also among the first to circulate US literature in Italy on a mass scale through their "Biblioteca universale," which included books by Poe, Whitman, Twain, Cooper, and Irving. The series "Romantica mondiale" offers another opportunity to quantitatively assess the rising popularity of US fiction: from 1928 to 1938, it hosted 60 US books by three best-selling authors: Zane Grey (16), Jack London (17), and James Oliver Curwood (27). In this same period, Sonzogno also published "Romantica economica," which was less interested in US authors and aimed, rather, to diversify the publisher's catalog at the level of plot types, settings, and authors' prestige (as surmised by its editors). As well as books by London and Curwood, "Romantica economica" included translations of works by writers such as Bret Harte, Rebecca Harding Davis, Edith Wharton, and Booth Tarkington (awarded with the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1919 and 1922).

Mondadori, however, was the most prolific publisher of US translations, which were concentrated in three book series: "Medusa," "Romanzi della Palma," and "I libri gialli" (see Scarpino). From 1933 to 1942, Mondadori published 26 US books in "Medusa" (1933-1971), promoting authors including Pearl S. Buck, John Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, and William Faulkner. US books comprised approximately 19.5% of 133 titles published in the first decade since "Medusa's" launch. This figure

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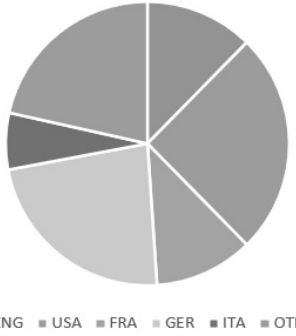
[13] The series also published *Cavallo di Troia* in 1942, by Morley Callaghan, whose inclusion in *Americana* despite being Canadian indicates that he was considered American.

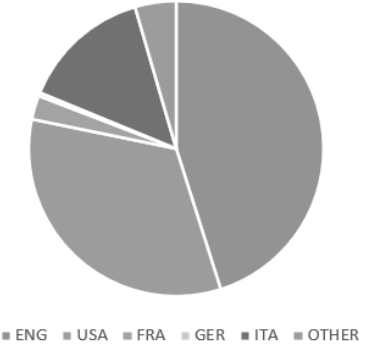
seems negligible until one compares it to the percentage, in this same period, of British (22.5%), German (22.5%), French (10%) and all other nationalities (22% total) (Fig. 1). These data highlight the leading literary trends pursued by this book series and demonstrate an equal distribution between the three most represented national literatures.

The relevance of US literature is even more evident in "Romanzi della palma" (1932 to 1943). Of its 186 titles, 47 were American, against 43 German books, 23 British books, and 40 titles by authors of other nationalities. As illustrated in Fig. 2, the US represented 25% of the books in the series, followed by Germany (23%), books from other nations (22%), Britain (12%), France (11%), and Italy (6%).



One of Mondadori's most popular book series, "I libri gialli," similarly highlights the marketability of US authors in Italy. The series was published

from 1929 to 1943 and included 266 titles, a third (88) of which were translations of American texts. As Fig. 3 shows, with the exception of Italian novels, the representation of other national literatures in percentage terms was extremely small (38). British literature covered 45% of the catalog, while US literature represented 33%. It is worth noting that US and British books in this series were mostly by best-selling authors, contrary to the more varied status of writers published in "Medusa" and "Romanzi della palma." In the case of British authors, the importance of Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie is easily graspable (54 and 20 books, respectively); none of the US writers could boast comparable numbers of titles, yet some authors recur as representative of the US noir tradition, such as Erle Stanley Gardner (14), Ellery Queen (11), and S.S. Van Dine (10).



Notably, the increasing number of translations of US books in Italy in this period is evident both within series that explicitly promoted themselves as "literary" and that privileged quality over quantity, and more commercially-oriented series that aimed at the mass market and thus included more titles. That ascent reached its peak with Mondadori's two broadest-ranging series – whose contents is also the most heterogeneous of the ones that have been discussed, encompassing a wide variety of genres as well as texts by authors of varying degrees of prestige. This analysis confirms that the censorial approach to US literature by the fascist regime was light-touch, and did not particularly limit the circulation of US titles in Italy.

Self-censorship and Self-reflexive Gazes

The expansion of US literature in Italy contributed to the construction of an American mythos that inspired the literary, cultural, and political sensibilities of an entire generation of young writers and intellectuals, providing what Donatella Izzo describes as "a counterweight and antidote to the narrowly provincial and intellectually stifling cultural atmosphere created by Italian fascism" (589; see also Fernandez; Carducci). Beginning with Agostino Lombardo (1961), scholars since the 1960s have identified two important forms of cultural resistance against the regime (see Ferme; Turi) in the translations of US literary texts and literary criticism on US literature by authors such as Pavese, Vittorini, and Giaime Pintor.[14] Echoing Pavese's oft-quoted words, "During those years, American culture allowed us to watch our own drama unfolding as if on a giant screen" (qtd. in Izzo 590), Izzo suggests that, for the young Italian *americanisti*, America "was first and foremost a utopia – or rather, a heterotopia," a "real place that took on a radically subversive function when seen as a political alternative to the reality *they* experienced, and capable of acting, quite literally as a self-reflexive mirror" (590; original emphasis). By referencing Foucault's concept of "heterotopia,"[15] Izzo implies that, through their access to and translation of US texts, these intellectuals contributed to an idea of the US in the popular imaginary that served as an ideological counternarrative to fascism and that influenced, too, the evolution of Italian literature both under the regime and following its collapse (Turi 79).

Izzo's reading of the first Italian *americanisti*'s conceptualization of the US provides a useful frame of reference for analyzing the logic that underpinned fascist censorship. The "contestatory power of heterotopias," she notes, "connects the question of alternative spatial configurations with the question of the gaze, [...] and its capacity to effect estranging and self-

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[14] I allude to Giaime Pintor 146-47, and Pavese 171.

[15] Michel Foucault defines this notion as "real places [...] that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed." ("Different Spaces" 178).

reflexive moves" (588). The regime's decision to permit the publication of US texts but demand the removal or editing of references to Italy that might encourage Italian readers to draw negative comparisons between Italian and US culture reflects a strategic recognition that though the myth of America could not be eradicated from the public imagination, it *could* be tempered, its parameters circumscribed, and what Izzo describes as its "contestatory power" neutered. The surgical removal of Italy from the pages of US texts provided a means to undermine US literature's capacity to activate readers' self-reflexive gaze or encourage critical appraisal of their own context. In this way, the regime sought to curb the potentially subversive elements of US literature, transforming it into a harmless spatial configuration, a place too distant to encourage self-reflection or affect (understandings of) fascist Italy.

The following qualitative analysis reveals these dynamics by drawing primarily on Fabre's research into the mechanisms of censorship following the 1934 circular letter from Mussolini that tightened the authorities' control over the editorial industry, and which includes documents relating to the fascist inspection and censorship of over 200 British, French, German, Italian, and American novels (*Il Censore*). Of the 23 (10%) on the list that were American – all of which were from Mondadori's three main book series – ten were censored and published after the regime's collapse and nine were blocked, inspected, and released for publication before 1943. The remaining three were inspected and banned following the circulation of Mussolini's letter, despite having been available in Italy for years. These data suggest that Mondadori's US translations were not governed by stricter standards of censorship than those applied to their translations of texts from other foreign countries. The data also suggest that these fascist policies tended to target the same themes (anti-war sentiments, abortion, suicide, socialism, race, and moral or religious issues) regardless of the text's provenance – which in turn indicates that US texts were not more heavily censored, preventatively or otherwise, than books from other countries. For example, the treatment of Hemingway's unflattering representation of the Caporetto defeat in *A Farewell to Arms* (published as *Addio alle Armi* in 1946) was underpinned by the same logic of the ban imposed on Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, (published as *Niente di nuovo sul*

fronte occidentale in 1931). Likewise, Gilmore Millen's *Un negro irresistibile*, originally published in "Romanzi della Palma" in 1932, was censored in 1938 for the same reason as Mura's (Maria Volpi Nannipieri) *Sambadù amore negro* (1934) – namely, its representation of a relationship between a white woman and what was deemed a hyper-sexualized Black character, which violated restrictions on the representation of Black people tightened in the wake of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (Åkerström 102-08).

While the consistency of the censors' attention to certain themes and topics does not preclude the possibility that the above-discussed books were also censored due to their discussion of, or references to, issues deemed sensitive in Italy at the time, this cannot be said of Hemingway's and Millen's books, which were not published in Italy during the fascist period and thus were not subjected to the cultural distancing measures that are my focus here. The latter, in fact, relied on episodes of micro-(self-) censorship aimed at protecting the national image projected by the regime from critical elements in US texts. Specifically, it entailed the manipulation of translations through omissions or slight changes by translators aimed at rendering books acceptable to the fascist authorities. Several US books translated into Italian in the interwar period were affected by this policy, especially after Mussolini's 1934 circular letter. In what follows, I focus on three emblematic cases of translations preventively manipulated to remove references to the Italian context and cultural image: John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936), translated by Vittorini and Montale, respectively, and John Dos Passos' *The Big Money* (1936), translated by Pavese. The three translators preempted potential issues by consistently manipulating the texts, generating a twofold effect: on the one hand, their choices satisfied the regime's pressing need to contain external criticism of Italy; on the other, by preventing acts of repressive censorship, translators guaranteed that US books continued to enter the Italian book market.

Vittorini's translation of Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* published by Bompiani in 1939 as *Pian della Tortilla* exemplifies this progressive erasure of Italy from translated US book in its elimination of the disparaging remarks about Italian people that punctuate the original text. In Chapter 1, Danny, the drunk protagonist, meets some Italian fishermen: "Race antipathy

overcame Danny's good sense. He menaced the fishermen. 'Sicilian bastards,' he called them, and 'Scum from the prison island,' and 'Dogs of dogs of dogs'" (Steinbeck, *Tortilla* 18). As Dunnett reports, Vittorini "dealt with Danny's overtly anti-Italian abuse by simply expunging the entire passage, reducing the dialogue to the bare bones of a brief exchange of greetings" (107). Dunnett observes that the same strategy was applied in Chapter 5, where Torrelli is described as having "the Italians' exaggerated and wholly quixotic ideal of marital relations" (Steinbeck, *Tortilla* 70). Once again, Vittorini eliminated the reference to Italian culture, decoupling the "quixotic idea of marital relations," which he translated as "una concezione donchisciottesca dei rapporti coniugali" (Steinbeck, *Pian* 48), from the Italian connotations Steinbeck had ascribed it. By omitting the original text's caricatural and stereotypical associations of Italians with poverty, drama, and emotional instability, Vittorini's translation prevents potential censorial objections to a derogatory and generalizing representation of the Italian people.

Dunnett signals a similar procedure with regards to *In Dubious Battle*, translated by Montale and published by Bompiani in 1940 as *La battaglia*. As he writes in a letter to the publisher, Montale erased the only two, and very similar, references to Italy. Where the original text reads "They've got this valley organized like Italy" (Steinbeck, *In Dubious* 156), Montale simply translated as "La valle è troppo organizzata" (Steinbeck, *Battaglia* 232) – literally "They've got this valley too organized". The same sentence appears in a later passage – "Doc Burton was snatched last night. I think he was. Doc was not a man to run out on us, but he is gone. This valley is organized like Italy" (Steinbeck, *In Dubious* 281) – and is translated by Montale in the same, simplified way. Both references to Italy allude to fascism and the regime's repression of mass protest and socialism. Montale emphasizes the rigidity of repressive control by using the adverb "troppo" ("too much") but softens an overt ideologically connoted reference to the Italian political context of the time by removing the adverb's referent (Italy). As he wrote to Bompiani, his interventions were few but targeted: namely, they were aimed, specifically, at eliminating all references to Italy in the target text (Montale, qtd. in Dunnett 108-09) to shield the Italian readership from a polemic acknowledgment of the illiberal and

antidemocratic order imposed by the regime. More than Vittorini's in *Pian della Tortilla*, Montale's interventions hinder Steinbeck's text's ability to encourage ideological dissent against fascism.

Pavese's translation of Dos Passos' *The Big Money*, published by Mondadori in 1938 as *Un mucchio di quattrini*, confirms the reliance on minimal forms of text manipulation with regards to references to Italy in foreign texts, especially after 1934. That year, Pavese had concluded the translation of *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), which showed great faithfulness to the source text. As Fabre summarizes, when Pavese submitted his translation of *The Big Money*, he wrote to Mondadori that he had erased mentions or allusions to fascism, silenced or reformulated parts where the derogatory terms "wop" and "dago" were used (397-98). In *The Big Money*, the occurrences of the two adjectives designate Italian nationality by shedding a negative light on it, potentially striking the Italian national pride that fascism was keen to promote and celebrate. Pavese proves careful and systematic: he omitted every occurrence of the terms in his translation ("wop" 7 times and "dago" twice). As the following examples attest, Pavese's self-censorial choices do not significantly alter the meaning of the original text, and are in keeping with other translators' management of potential threats to fascists' standards of cultural pride.

In the section "Art and Isidora," Dos Passos writes: "One day at a little restaurant at Golfe Juan she picked up a goodlooking young wop who kept a garage and drove a little Bugatti Racer" (*The Big Money* 123). In one of the "Camera Eye" sections, the original text reads: "What did the elderly wop selling chestnuts whisper to the fat woman behind the picklejars?" (56). In a longer passage in "Charley Anderson," Dos Passos writes: "It wasn't a hotel or a callhouse, it was some kind of a dump with tables and it stank of old cigarsmoke and last night's spaghetti and tomatosauce and dago red. What time is it? A fat wop and a young slickhaired wop in their dirty shirtsleeves were shaking him. 'Time to pay up and get out. Here's your bill'" (278-79). All these references to "wop" and "dago" are omitted in the Italian translation: "Un giorno in una piccola trattoria di Golfe Juan trovò un bel giovanotto che aveva un'autorimessa e guidava una piccola Bugatti da corsa" (Dos Passos, *Un mucchio* 1021); "che cos'ha bisbigliato quel vecchio che vende castagne alla grassona dietro i sottaceti?" (1053);

and "Non era un albergo né una casa equivoca, era una sorta di tampa coi tavolini e puzzava di vecchio fumo di sigaro, di spaghetti della sera prima, di salsa di pomodoro e di vino rosso. Qualcuno gli dava scrolloni. 'Che ora è?' Un grassone e un giovane dai capelli lustri, in maniche di camicia sporche, lo stavano scrollando. 'È ora di pagare e andarsene. Ecco il conto'" (1190).

To these examples, it is worth adding one that conveys more overtly political implications. "Mary French" includes an explicit reference to Sacco and Vanzetti. Dos Passos writes: "Her job was keeping in touch with newspapermen and trying to get favorable items into the press. It was uphill work. Although most of the newspapermen who had any connection with the case thought the two had been wrongly convicted they tended to say that they were just two wop anarchists, so what the hell?" (*The Big Money* 361). The translation is faithful except for one crucial detail: the "two wop anarchists" become European: "due anarchici europei" (*Un mucchio* 1279). Pavese operates a stronger self-censorial turn: in addition to protecting the Italian national pride on a local level, the transformation of Sacco and Vanzetti from Italians to Europeans silences those voices in political opposition to fascism that could have drawn on the international notoriety of the episode to attack the fascist brand of Italian nationhood.

These three cases demonstrate the consistency with which Italian translators sought to prevent the censorship or outright ban of US literature by preemptively erasing references to Italy that the regime's censors would be likely to deem offensive. These included not only critical representations of fascism, but also stereotypical portrayals of Italians, and Italianness, that by enlivening readers to other nations' perceptions of their culture might, according to censors' logic, engender critical self-reflection and skepticism towards the image of the nation the regime was intent on projecting.

Conclusion

The quantitative analysis presented in the first part of this article bases the ambivalent relationship that characterized Italian fascism and the cultural perception of the United States on data on the circulation of US books

translated into Italian in the 1930s and 1940s. Whereas censors cautiously monitored the promotion of US culture through literature, the number of works of fiction by US authors published in fascist Italy shows that the censors' aversion to the United States was mitigated by dynamics inherent to the book market as well as by the impetus to build a national popular consensus. Concomitantly, in alignment with the reception of other foreign literatures, the translation of books by US authors highlights an ambiguous combination of approaches and procedures adopted by the fascist censors. While this falls outside the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that the stealthy mechanisms of the fascist censorial apparatus bear several commonalities with the ways in which the circulation of foreign cultural products in Italy was subject to conditions even under more democratic governments, before and after fascism, such as during the Giolitti's age (Catolfi 1-2) or after the Second World War (see Baldi).

The qualitative analysis in the second part of the article deals with the measures of preventive and productive censorship that publishers and translators adopted to avoid the full censorship of US literature and that led them to manipulate translations to meet the fascist impositions. This resulted in self-censoring translation choices that played down and/or erased the subversive potential of US texts on Italian readers. Italian translators pursued the strategy of systematically eliminating references to the Italian political and cultural scenario. These interventions represented a minimal alteration of the meaning of the source texts, but suggest that the regime endorsed, or at least was not interested in opposing, the reception of US literature as long as books did not (or were prevented from) project(ing) a negative light on Italy and undermine consensus for the regime. By sanitizing the representations of Italy and Italian culture in US literature, translations contributed to metaphorically repositioning (the image of) the United States as too far away for spotlighting the controversies that characterized the Italian context. Whereas the most influential Italian translators of the time perceived US literature as providing a lens through which to observe and understand their own culture, the fascist authorities prompted Italian publishers to minimize the possible forms of criticism of Italy that might originate from US literature.

Author's bionote

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