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FRIEDRICH WILHELM IV'S TAILOR AND SIGNIFICANCE IN TRANSLATION HISTORY

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That translation historians should think of themselves as historians as well as translation scholars is not a new idea, but the theoretical and methodological implications of this idea still need to be fully explored. In particular, translation historians have much to gain by considering the theoretical discussions that have already taken place within historical studies and the philosophy of history because, if we set aside the *a priori* importance that translation historians accord to language and cultural exchange, there is no significant difference between translation historians and other historians in terms of the theoretical issues and methodological choices they face; or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that there shouldn't be.¹

Some interest among translation historians in the theoretical discussions within history is already apparent: translation historians have taken an interest in microhistory (Adamo 2006; Malena 2011; Wakabayashi 2018); in *histoire croisée* (Batchelor and Harding 2017; Milani 2017); there have been discussions on the role of archives and on research into oral history (Kujamäki and Footitt 2019; Paloposki 2017); and work has been done on using images in historical research (Fernández-Ocampo and Wolf 2014) – to cite just a few examples.² In what follows I draw on a classic theoretical discussion within history and the philosophy of history which began towards the end of the nineteenth century and stretched to the end of the twentieth, and will consider its implications for translation historians and the methodological and theoretical approaches they adopt.

Friedrich Wilhelm IV's tailor

On 3 April 1849, after a year of revolution, the parliament in Frankfurt am Main offered Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia the imperial crown of Germany in the hope of finally achieving a unified German state. The Kaiser had been expecting the offer; he was attracted by the idea of being Emperor but deplored the democratic associations that came with being given the crown by the liberal parliament. So he refused, saying (so the story goes) that he could not accept “a crown from the gutter” and would only accept it if offered to him by

the German princes. This refusal effectively put an end to the revolutionary movement in Germany, and the parliament in Frankfurt was expelled by the Prussian army and had to take refuge in Stuttgart, where it was eventually shut down by the Württemberg troops (Robertson 1952:165–167; Taylor 1945:86–87).³

In his *Die grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen begriffsbildung. Eine logische einleitung in die historischen wissenschaften* (1896), translated into English by Guy Oakes as *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science. A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences* (1986), the philosopher Heinrich Rickert remarked that while this was a significant historical event, no one was interested in the tailors who made Friedrich Wilhelm IV's uniforms (Rickert 1986:71):

That Friedrich Wilhelm IV declined the German crown is a 'historical' event, but the question of which tailors made his uniforms remains a matter of complete indifference for political history, even though we could probably acquire precise knowledge of this too.

The historian Eduard Meyer (1902) responded to this argument in *Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte* (On the Theory and Methodology of History), where he suggested that the tailor who made Friedrich Wilhelm's coat was an insignificant detail in political history, though he could be construed as important in a history of fashion, tailoring or prices. Rickert (1986:71–72), in turn, responded to Meyer's objection as follows:⁴

This is, of course, true, but it proves nothing about the general principle at issue here. It is rather the case that the objection even admits the necessity of a principle of selection for political history. Moreover, facts can easily be cited that are inessential to every conceivable historical representation.

Rickert then continues to elaborate on this point with the example of how historically insignificant any study would be of the distribution of the ink in Friedrich Wilhelm's letters. Perfectly feasible, and filled with indisputable facts, but it would not qualify as 'historical science': "Thus the 'historical concept' of the King cannot consist of everything that might be reliably established about him" (ibid.:72). The situation, Rickert says, is different when there is only a little information about something. This can cause relatively minor details to acquire a greater significance by virtue of the general lack of information on a subject. But, even in this case, the historian must proceed by a process of selection (ibid.):

Thus even when history knows *too little* about its objects, it still knows *too much* about them. For this reason, it can never confine itself to narrating 'what really happened' or to proceeding 'idiographically'. On the contrary, it always has the task of separating the essential from the inessential. For this purpose, however, there must be governing perspectives.

Weber's response

This discussion, conducted at a distance between Rickert and Meyer over Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor, was then taken up by Max Weber in an essay published in 1906 under the title 'Kritische Studien Auf Dem Gebiet Der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik', translated into English by Edward Shils and Henry Finch as 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the

Cultural Sciences' (1949).⁵ The essay is presented as a critique of Meyer's methodological ideas;⁶ in it Weber addresses a variety of issues, which can be summarized very briefly as follows: methodology in historical research, which he argues "is no more the precondition of fruitful intellectual work than the knowledge of anatomy is the precondition for 'correct' walking" (1949:115); the difficulty of attributing causality and motives to historical events; the inappropriateness of value judgements in the 'science' of history and the danger of blurring the "sharp distinction between historical knowledge and ethics" (ibid.:124); and the implications of selecting the defining details of a historical event out of a potentially limitless number of factors. Weber then asks the question, quoting Meyer, "which of the events on which we have information are 'historical'?", and agrees with Meyer that "the 'historical' is that which is causally important in a concrete individual situation" (ibid.:131). The problem is that even with this general criterion of selecting only events which have produced an 'effect', the number of historical events is still potentially infinite. Therefore, the historian must make a selection based on historical interest and, Weber reports Meyer as stating, "there are no absolute norms of historical interest" (ibid.:131).

This brings us back to Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his tailor, in relation to which Weber accuses Meyer of renouncing the effect principle that he has just established. Weber (ibid.:132) agrees with Meyer that, although Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor might not be of interest to political history, he may well be of interest to historians of fashion or tailoring; but he argues that Meyer is overlooking the fact that the kind of "interest" that we can take in these two cases

involves quite considerable differences in logical structure and ... the failure to bear these differences in mind leads to the danger of confusing two fundamentally different but often identified categories: the *ratio essendi* [reason for being] and the *ratio cognoscendi* [reason for knowing].⁷

The distinction that Weber is making here is between, on the one hand, facts which can merely be considered pieces of evidence used heuristically to reconstruct the generic character of certain epochs or historical processes, and, on the other, events which are real causal links in a historical sequence, events which, to reprise Meyer's earlier criterion, have had a historical 'effect' – one which can be established objectively, or scientifically, as Weber would have it.

Weber likens Friedrich Wilhelm's coat to the clay fragments used to reconstruct the history of ancient societies, or to the names of 'insignificant persons' which appear in historical documents or on old inscriptions; although we can infer from these something about the actual causal processes of history, they did not themselves have any causal effect within them. Weber thus essentially accuses Meyer of confusing the *historically interesting* with the *historically effective*, of confusing "the real causal links in historical interconnections (rejection of the Kaiser's crown) with those facts (Friedrich Wilhelm IV's coat, the inscriptions) which can become important for the historian as heuristic instruments" (ibid.:136). If, on the other hand, it were to be established that the tailor had produced a causal effect, then Weber acknowledges that he too would, like the Kaiser, become historically significant (ibid.:135–136):

The fact that a certain tailor delivered a certain coat to the king is *prima facie* of quite inconsequential causal significance, even for the cultural-historical causal interconnection of the development of fashion and the tailoring industry. It would cease to be

so only when as a result of this particular delivery historical *effects* were produced, e.g., if the personality of this tailor, or the fortunes of *his* enterprise were causally significant from some standpoint for the transformation of fashion or industrial organization and if this historical role had been causally affected by the delivery of that very coat.

To this we might object that the standpoint we adopt in order to measure the effect of an event is not an objective or scientific one. Even if the fortunes of the tailor's enterprise had transformed only his life and that of his descendants, and did not produce any effects on a more macro scale, on fashions or industry, it would still be historically significant if the tailor and his firm played a prominent role in the perspective *we had chosen to adopt*. This is something Weber acknowledges when elaborating further on historical significance using the example of Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen's experiments on X-rays. If one's purpose is to understand how X-rays work, then the significance of the actual rays which Roentgen saw in his laboratory lies only in the extent to which they allowed him to infer a law of natural occurrence, not in their immediate effect at that moment or what happened to them afterwards. But, if one's interest lies in the history of physics, then the logical status of these specific rays would change as they would become a causal link in the process by which modern physics developed, a process rooted in a set of *values* which we can call "the progress of science" (Weber 1949:134 n.10).

So, logically speaking, from whatever perspective (standpoint) we adopt, there will be events that have a causal *historical effect*, and there will be events that are of *historical interest* due to the insight we can infer heuristically from them. Weber insists on the importance of this distinction (*ibid.*:136; emphasis added):

These are absolutely fundamental logical distinctions and they will always remain so. And however much these two absolutely distinct standpoints become intertwined in the practice of the student of culture – this always happens and is the source of the most interesting methodological problems – no one will ever succeed in understanding the logical character of history if he is unable to make this distinction in a clearcut manner.

However, Weber argues that Meyer's ideas on what constitutes historical effect are misguided. For, if we are to select events on the basis of their historical effect, then we must establish which 'final outcome' we see as having been fundamentally affected by those events. Equally, we must also decide whether or not we are to exclude from our history all events that are seen as historically inconsequential. According to Weber, Meyer is not just confusing historical *interest* with historical *effect*, but he is also confusing two different types of historical facts: those which we value for their own sake, as objects of our interest, and those which we seek to understand in terms of their causal value. The former are historical 'individuals' and the latter are historical 'causes'; what Rickert called primary and secondary historical facts. It is only possible, Weber suggests, to confine oneself to historical causes, or effects, as Meyer suggests we do, if it is unambiguously clear which individual(s) these effects are to be related to (*ibid.*:155).

But, in Weber's opinion, the real reason for considering something as historical is not its effect, but the interest we identify in it. To make this point, Weber proposes a different example, that of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein, a married woman with whom he maintained a long and intense friendship that is considered to have played

a fundamental role in his artistic and intellectual growth (Vincent 1992:ch.2). Weber first hypothesizes five different logical types of historical interest which these letters could in theory be the object of, summarized very briefly here: (1) if we consider these letters to be part of an event which had a significant impact on Goethe's life and personality, then there is no doubt about their historical significance; (2) but, if we hypothesize that these letters had no significant impact on Goethe and his work, no causal historical effect, then they might prove to be of interest as a heuristic means for understanding the man and his life; (3) or, the letters might not tell us anything about Goethe, but function as a heuristic paradigm, a typical fact which helps us to understand the particular cultural and social *milieu* in which he moved; (4) or we might decide that the letters can tell us nothing about German or nineteenth-century culture specifically, but are merely the typical manifestation of a certain set of social and cultural circumstances which are common to all cultures, in which case we might use the letters as a "genetic class-concept" with which to reconstruct the specific conditions which produce these common cultural circumstances; (5) or, finally, we can hypothesize that the letters are of no interest at all, and that they are not characteristic of any social context or period, but that we find some interest in the insight they provide us into the psychology of love and the way in which they are representative of a certain state of mind (Weber 1949:140–141).

According to Weber these are all logically distinct approaches, even though they may be combined and co-exist. But, Weber says, more important than these types of interest is a sixth: one where Goethe's letters become an object of valuation, without us having to know anything about Goethe, but purely because of their characteristics, on the basis of which they become the object of our interpretation, or what Weber calls our "value-analysis". So, rather than consider objects historical because of their effect (like the Kaiser's refusal), as Meyer argues, or consider them as historical because of their paradigmatic and heuristic value, their value as a class concept (like the Kaiser's coat), we consider them historical because of their significance based on our *interpretation*; and any object can generate a potentially infinite range of interpretations, depending on the standpoint of the historian (ibid.:147):

Value-analysis deals with facts which are neither (1) themselves links in an historical causal sequence, nor (2) usable as heuristic means for disclosing facts of category (1). In other words, the facts of value-analysis stand in none of the relations to history which have been hitherto considered.

So, our historical inquiry is made up of two parts: a *subjective* identification or delimitation of the object, based on our interest, our value-analysis, followed by the *objective* reconstruction of causal historical events based on a scientific examination of the available evidence, the actual historical research.

Veyne's application of narrative

Nearly seventy years later, the French archaeologist and historian Paul Veyne also discussed the case of Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor and Weber's analysis in his book *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai d'épistémologie* (1971), translated into English by Mina Moore-Rinvulucrici as *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (1984).⁸ In this book, Veyne proposes a marked narrative

approach to history, one in which history “has no method” (ibid.:ix) and “historians tell of true events in which man is the actor; history is a true novel” (ibid.:x). Veyne discusses Weber and Friedrich Wilhelm in a chapter that deals with historical specificity. Interestingly, he presents the question as if the example of Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor had been posed by Weber and does not mention that it was originally posed by Rickert, or that Meyer had responded to it.

The first point he makes is that the difference between a “value fact” (a fact of historical interest) and a “document fact” (an element of historical causation) depends on the point of view chosen by the historian; what Weber called the historian’s standpoint but which Veyne calls his/her “chosen plot” (Veyne 1984:50). The same historical object can mean very different things depending on how it is plotted. Therefore, he argues, there is no real difference in the nature of a bit player or a main player in a history; it is the plot that makes them so, and a different plot could reverse these roles (ibid.:50; emphasis added):

That being said, it is with that potsherd [the clay fragment we mentioned above] as with any other event: It may play, in the plot of which it is an event, the most important parts or be only part of a crowd scene; but, in spite of what Weber says, there is no difference of nature between the main parts and the figures in the crowd – mere shades separate them, *one goes gradually from one to the other, and in the end sees that Frederick William IV himself is basically one of a crowd.*

Veyne agrees with what Rickert, Meyer and Weber have all argued before him (albeit in different terms), that if the plot of one’s history is the evolution of fashion then Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor might play a main role. The importance of the tailor is determined by the plot that the historian chooses *a priori* (ibid.:51):

If the evolution of fashion is taken as the plot, that evolution is made by the tailors who upset it and also by those who keep it in the old ruts; the importance of the event in its series decides the number of lines the historian will devote to it, but does not decide the choice of the series.

As will be apparent, this is something of a simplification of Weber’s much more complex and articulated argument, but the essential point agrees with his. Veyne then develops his argument along new lines when he elaborates on his idea of historical specificity.

The key point Veyne makes concerns the difference between the singular and the specific, or between the individual and the individualized. A singular or individual event is individualized and made specific by being framed within a plot; or to adopt Weber’s terminology, its specificity is derived from the value-interpretation which we give it, based on our standpoint. History, Veyne argues, does not interest itself in the individual life of someone, be they king or tailor, but in what that life represents for us. History, as he puts it, “is not a vast collection of biographies” (ibid.:56): Instead (ibid.:57; emphasis added):

The lives of all the tailors under Frederick William are very much alike, so history will relate them as a whole because it has no reason to be interested in one particular one; *it does not deal in individuals, but in what is specific about them. ... Whether the individual is an outstanding figure in history or a crowd figure among millions of others, he counts historically only for his specificity.*

A historical figure or event, then, acquires historical significance to the extent that it corresponds to our interest, an interest which was formed *a priori* and on which our historical account is predicated; that figure's life acquires specificity in the sense that it has certain qualities that have meaning for us in terms of the story that we have chosen to tell. And, according to Veyne, Weber's discussion about values missed the real point of the issue: his "argument about the king's tailors and the relationship to values hid the true position of the question, which is the distinction between the singular and the specific" (ibid.:57). The logical extension of this argument is that, as history is made up of specific events, which are all distinguishable by their differences, there can be no universal history (ibid.:59):

The historical is that which is not universal and not singular. For it not to be universal, there must be a difference; for it not to be singular, it must be specific, it must be understood, for that sends us back to the plot.⁹

Significance in translation history

What implications can we draw from this discussion for translation historians? Weber and Veyne both convincingly argue that significance and meaning in history are entirely subjective. One implication of this with respect to any potential interdisciplinary dialogue between historians of translation and other historians is that if the plot we use to frame our history is defined in terms that belong exclusively to translation studies, the likelihood is that it will carry little significance or meaning for those situated outside the discourse of that field. If we want to encourage an interdisciplinary dialogue with non-TS historians (something I personally seek to do), then we need to define our plot in terms that are shared with those historians. I will return to this point later.

Related to this is the issue of selection, or, to use Weber's term, the delimitation of our historical object. The question is whether we should consider any and all translation events to be potentially significant, or whether we should accept that some events are simply not significant, however one plots them. If the latter, then we must ask how we define these 'inconsequential' events. This is more a practical (or strategic) issue than a theoretical one. In theory, as we have seen, any event is potentially significant; I can think of no logical criteria for excluding a certain category of events. But, in practice, as scholars we take part in a discourse and seek to share our insights with others. We will therefore always be influenced to some extent by what others find interesting as well as our own preferences. Depending on who we choose to address, which discourse we seek to engage with, and the extent we wish to innovate within our chosen discourse, it is likely that there will, in practice, be translation events that have no conceivable historical meaning and are not worth spending time on. In Weber's terms, it depends on which set of values we relate our history to. I would argue that the nature of translation studies as an interdiscipline means that it encompasses a wide range of values – in Weber's terms – which are not necessarily in sympathy with each other. This is true even within translation and interpreting history. The interpreting historian who studies the Nuremberg trials in order to examine the techniques used by the interpreters, and whose value-analysis is the birth of the interpreting profession, will tell a very different story to, say, the historian whose interest is in the political impact of the trials and their function in the establishment of the post-Second World

War world-order, even if this historian acknowledges the important role that the language services played.

This point can also be illustrated with an example on translation, one related to my own field of interest. If I am researching the role played by translators who worked for certain key Italian publishing houses during the Fascist period, and I am seeking to foreground their role as cultural gatekeepers, as translation agents who promoted a boom in translated fiction, then I will not be particularly concerned with how they actually translated or with their working conditions. But, if I am looking at those (few) Jewish writers who, when they found themselves unable to publish their own work after the introduction of official anti-Semitism in 1938, were able to publish some translations under a pseudonym, then clearly the minutiae of their working conditions take on a whole new significance. Or, if I wish to document the self-censorship practices of translators at that time, and the way in which they adapted to the restrictions imposed by the regime, then clearly the way they translated becomes significant for me. And, finally, if I want to reconstruct the attitude of the regime towards translation and how this changed as the regime's ideological priorities evolved and became increasingly hostile, then I will not be interested in almost any of the above, for the simple reason that the regime was not interested in them; I will not find significance in the individual translators, or the individual texts and how they were translated.

Moreover, as I have already argued, establishing criteria which allow us to exclude certain events as historically inconsequential is theoretically complex; it all depends on what we find interesting, and anything we find interesting can be understood as historically significant. This issue is at the heart of Croce's distinction between chronicle and history mentioned earlier, in note 9: if an object from the past has meaning for us in the present it becomes part of our history; otherwise it is relegated to the chronicles of dead events (Croce 1919:pt I, ch.1). This is what Veyne means when he distinguishes between the singular, which has no meaning for us, and the specific, which does. Translation studies is a relatively young discipline whose intellectual endeavours are motivated to a significant extent by a desire to reveal/foreground the unacknowledged role that translation plays in the present and has played in the past. While this is understandable, it is worth considering the effect that such a dominant value-analysis can have on translation history. Are we in danger at times of anachronistically projecting an importance that we feel in the present onto a historical period in which this importance was not felt?

If translation is our main object and theme of our research, then the issue does not arise; our research is focused on translation and anything related to translation is potentially significant if we find it to be so. But if we want to relate our research on translation to broader issues, such as literary, cultural, social or political history, then the question becomes more complex. There is potentially a danger that our set of values may condition the way we interpret the documentary evidence and induce us to exaggerate its importance. This is, of course, a risk that all historians face; the difference for translation and interpreting historians lies in the fact that the *a priori* standpoint they adopt is, to a greater extent than in the case of other historians, the very justification of their work as researchers. How easy is it for a translation historian to acknowledge that, in fact, in this or that particular respect translation was not particularly significant in the historical theme they have chosen to research? I will return to this point after discussing a few more examples.

Another issue which is analogous to that discussed above is the danger of succumbing to the *myth of translation*. Here the issue is not one of significance or interest, but of not

allowing our pre-conceived interest to distort our reading of the evidence. In other words, adapting what Weber says slightly, we must be wary of confusing historical interest with historical effect; we must not allow our value-interpretation to interfere with our objective reading of the evidence. One of the main points of Weber's argument is that a historian must be able to draw a distinction between what is objectively documented and what is subjectively considered interesting. Or, to put it in Veyne's terms, a historian must not allow value-facts to distort his or her interpretation of document-facts. To illustrate this point, I will refer briefly to my own area of research: translation in Fascist Italy. Two key figures in twentieth-century Italian literary life were Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini. They are principally remembered as novelists, but they were also essayists and translators. During the 1930s, when they were both young and up-and-coming writers, Pavese and Vittorini were very active translators, both as a way of earning some extra money and as an expression of their passion for foreign literature. Pavese famously wrote that the 1930s were the *decennio delle traduzioni*, the decade of translations, a label which has stuck and which conditions many people's perception of the period and the role that translations played in it. According to this narrative, these young writers sought refuge from the stultifying cultural atmosphere which prevailed under the Fascist regime by translating foreign literature, especially American novels, which, again according to this narrative, allowed them to access more challenging and innovative forms of artistic expression. The culmination of this activity was an anthology of translated American literature, titled *Americana* (1941), which Vittorini edited and to which many of the most prominent members of the Italian literary establishment contributed translations.¹⁰

Americana acquired an almost legendary status after the war, as did the story of its censorship by the regime. It was, so the legend has it, an anthology which the regime blocked because it contained innovative foreign literature that did not chime with reactionary Fascist values. This notorious act of censorship also encouraged a widely held idea that to translate American literature in Fascist Italy was an act of courage, a form of resistance. The idea provided a nice way of tying the translation activities of these two writers to the Resistance movement which rose up in Italy after the armistice with the Allies was signed in August 1943, and which ensured a degree of political credibility for Italy after the war, despite over twenty years of Fascism.¹¹ This is a legend that is bound to appeal to many translation scholars: translation as an act of courage, translation as a form of anti-Fascist resistance.

It is quite feasible, however, to reconstruct a different story, one in which translation is still significant but it does not acquire the same mythical status. First, it is true that the *Americana* anthology was censored; the first edition of 1941 was blocked and was never distributed. However, thanks to the collaborative approach of the Minister for Popular Culture (the state censor) – Alessandro Pavolini, a man with his own literary interests – a revised edition was later authorized and published late in 1942, once Vittorini's introduction and commentary had been replaced with less enthusiastic and celebratory substitutes. In other words, by agreeing to a piece of paratextual camouflage (one that was proposed by the censor, note, who was certainly not stupid or naive), Vittorini was able to publish his paean to American literature; this when Italy was already at war with the USA. The question, then, is whether it is historically more accurate to consider this to have been a notorious episode of Fascist censorship, or a striking example of the censor's flexibility? What is certain is that the former is the narrative that has become enshrined in the myth of the decade of translations.¹²

It is equally possible to contest the idea that translating American literature was an act of courage and/or resistance. First, there is no evidence of any language-specific policy against translations on the part of the regime. Despite its undoubted hostility towards Britain and the United States, the regime never targeted translations from English specifically.¹³ Secondly, there is no evidence that there was any serious risk attached to translating either American literature or any other. While it is true that if a translated book was banned this was financially damaging for the publisher, there is no evidence of there being any form of retribution as a result of any mistakes. Quite the opposite: the state censor, the Ministry for Popular Culture, maintained a generally cordial and collaborative relationship with most publishers, and this meant in many cases that rather than ban a book (translation or otherwise), the regime would agree to strategic cuts, thereby enabling the publisher to publish after all, and reducing the financial damage. There are even examples of the Ministry offering to compensate publishers for the damage suffered when a book was banned. This is not to say that the Fascist regime was not repressive or that some publishers did not face serious difficulties. Any kind of open opposition was certainly not tolerated, and Jewish publishers faced serious difficulties after the introduction of official anti-Semitism in 1938. But most publishers were perfectly happy to align themselves publicly with the regime, whatever their private convictions might have been, in order to pursue their business. I know of no instance, moreover, in which a translator suffered directly as a consequence of translating a book that the regime disapproved of. The reality was therefore very different from, or let us say more nuanced than, the image that is promoted in the more mythical narratives about this period, inspired by the experiences of Pavese and Vittorini.

Translation as a part of history

I started this discussion with a brief reflection on interdisciplinarity, and it is appropriate to conclude with a reflection on the way in which translation can succeed in permeating historical studies. I will refer again to Italian Fascism as it would not be possible to conduct this kind of analysis without an in-depth familiarity with the relevant historiography. The question I want to consider is how both historians and historians of translation have come to adopt a standpoint, a plot as Veyne would put it, which has allowed them to effectively participate in a common discourse and start producing a common history of Fascism, one which includes translation. This is not a translation history with a focus on Fascism, but a history of Fascism in which translation is part of the narrative.

Up until the end of the twentieth century, if translations were ever referred to in reference to the history of the Fascist period, it was almost always in terms of the ‘decade of translations’ and the mythical status of American literature, as I illustrated above. In other words, translation existed within the narrative of Italian literary history of the inter-war years, but it was viewed through the prism of the experiences of an elite group of writers, like Pavese and Vittorini, and was almost entirely absent from the political and social history of Fascism. Since the turn of the century this situation has changed. The change has occurred around three main research areas which I summarize very briefly below: censorship, publishing history, and the reception of foreign literature.

Historians interested in censorship under the Fascist regime were among the first to take note of the research being undertaken on this topic by translation scholars. As an increasing amount of research was done on the documentary evidence on censorship in general, and in

particular on the consequences of official anti-Semitism, it became clear that although the regime intervened relatively late against translations, it was concerned about their impact and did eventually impose restrictions on them. Around the same time, book historians were beginning to show an increasing interest in popular literature and its impact on the publishing industry, and it became clear that translations played a fundamental role in the birth of modern industrialized models of publishing in Italy and in the birth of a market for mass popular fiction. Again, this was a field in which historians and translation historians found themselves working on the same documentary evidence and engaging in the same historical discourse. Finally, as the idea of including translations in any historical reconstruction of Italian culture in the twentieth century became increasingly accepted, a new generation of literary historians began to do research on the Italian literary field during the inter-war period which included translated literature as a matter of course. Here too, historians and translation historians found much common ground, and a shared narrative has since evolved where the distinction between cultural historian, language area specialist, comparatist and translation scholar has become much less significant. A final question to consider is one I already raised above: is this increasing presence of translation in our understanding of the Fascist period accurate, or is it a distortion derived from a current interest in translation as a historical object, one which provides a fresh perspective through which to examine what is, after all, a very heavily researched field?

Based on my experience working on the primary sources of the period, I would argue that in this case the increasing presence of translation is not a distortion. The sources indicate incontrovertibly that translation became a bone of contention in what today we would call a culture war over the impact that foreign literature was having on the Italian literary field. It was also an issue which the cultural arm of the regime was concerned about, as the documentary evidence clearly shows.¹⁴ The fact that translation has become widely included in the historiography on Fascism, I would therefore argue, is a historically valid reflection of the reality of the Fascist period. That said, we should still be on our guard against any distortion or exaggeration which may be prompted by our enthusiasm for translation as a research object – such as the myth of translations of American literature as a form of anti-fascist resistance, which I discussed above. Translation could be justifiably seen as a form of resistance in the Fascist period when it was used to give work to ostracized Jewish authors; when it introduced literature that proposed social, gender and sexual models that were in clear contrast with those promoted by the regime; and when it offered Italians a glimpse of different, often more glamorous lifestyles. But one should not exaggerate the impact of these subtle forms of resistance; they did not amount to anti-fascism and there is no evidence that they affected the loyalty that Italians felt towards the regime. In other words, rather than seeing them as a form of resistance, it is more accurate in my opinion to see the first example as a means of survival involving a handful of authors and as an example of the disorganized way in which the regime imposed its anti-Semitic policies,¹⁵ and the second and third examples as part of the modernization of Italian society, a process that was taking place all over the industrialized world, against similar reactionary prejudices and borne up by the same irresistible economic and cultural forces.

To return to the terms of the theoretical discussion with which I began this essay, a historical plot has developed on the history of the Fascist period in which the Kaiser and his tailor are part of the same narrative; or, to put this in translation terms, history and translation are part of the same narrative. I am not in a position to judge reliably whether a similar

blurring of the disciplinary boundaries between history and translation history is occurring in other areas of historical research; but logically, I would expect this to be so, and my more superficial familiarity with themes other than Fascism in translation history would appear to confirm this. The reader will be in a position to reflect on their own area of historical interest and consider whether a similar process is taking place there.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter I will use *historian* to mean a historian whose primary concern is not translation; and *translation historian* to indicate a scholar whose historical research is premised on an interest in translation.
- 2 For a more detailed engagement with the historiography and metadiscourse of translation history, see Rundle (2019).
- 3 Robertson quotes a letter that Friedrich Wilhelm wrote on 13 December 1848 to his friend and advisor Baron Bunsen which shows how reluctant he was to accept the crown: “What is offered me? Is this birth of the hideous labor of the year 1848 a crown? The thing which we are talking about does not carry the sign of the holy cross, does not bear the stamp ‘by the Grace of God’ on its head, is no crown. It is the iron collar of servitude, by which the heir of more than twenty-four rulers, electors and kings, the head of 16,000,000, the master of the most loyal and bravest army in the world, would be made the bondservant of the revolution” (1952:165, n.6).
- 4 Rickert’s book first came out in 1896, four years before Meyer’s study, so his response to Meyer’s comments must have been added in successive revisions. This is borne out by the way in which Weber (1949) reports the exchange in his essay on Meyer and by the fact that Rickert was known to have worked on the same two books for most of his life, continually updating and revising them, also in response to comments and criticisms that previous versions had received.
- 5 There is a more recent English translation of this essay by Hans Henrik Bruun in the volume *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings* (Weber 2012).
- 6 In his discussion of Meyer’s ideas, Weber refers mainly to *Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte*, mentioned above, but also to Meyer’s introduction to his most famous work, *Geschichte des Altertums*, published in a number of volumes between 1884 and 1902.
- 7 Longuenesse (2001:67) explains that “Kant himself, in the pre-critical text that discusses this principle, distinguishes at least four types of reason, and therefore four specifications of the corresponding principle – *ratio essendi* (reason for *being*, that is, reason for the essential determinations of a thing), *ratio fiendi* (reason for the *coming to be* of a thing’s determinations), *ratio existendi* (reason for the *existence* of a thing), and *ratio cognoscendi* (reason for our *knowing that* a thing is thus and so)”.
- 8 More recently, Anton Zijderveld (2006:277–278) has also discussed Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor in his monograph on Heinrich Rickert, but he does not add anything new to the discussion.
- 9 Veyne makes the interesting point here that his distinction between the specific and the singular “recovers in part that made by Benedetto Croce between history and the chronicle” (1984:298, n.10), by which he means that a chronicle is made up of singular events which have no meaning or relevance to us today, while a history is made up of specific events that have a meaning for us, one which is expressed in the way in which the events are narrated. See chapter one, ‘History and Chronicle’ (Croce 1919). See also Rundle (2012:234–235), where I discuss this passage in more detail.
- 10 For more details on the myth of America during the Fascist period, see Dunnett (2015). For more details on the censorship of the anthology *Americana*, see Rundle (2010:ch.5).
- 11 Vittorini did take an active part in the Resistance, an experience documented in his novel *Uomini e no* (Men and not Men, 1945), the first novel to be published on the Italian Resistance. Pavese did not take part in the resistance and was not particularly active politically, although he was arrested in 1935 during a round up of suspected anti-fascists. He was sentenced to internal exile because the police found some letters between communist activists who were using his home as a safe address (Smith 2008).
- 12 For the idea of paratexts as a form of discursive camouflage in contexts of ideological repression, see Tyšš (2017). For an in-depth critique (in Italian and in four installments) of the myth of the

decade of translations in current interpretations of cultural life in 1930s Italy, see Petrillo (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b).

- 13 There is one exception that I am aware of. Francesca Nottola (2010) has found evidence that the regime adopted a policy of denying the publisher Einaudi permission to publish translations of American literature in the late 1930s. However, this was clearly intended as a means of obstructing a publisher who was considered hostile to the regime rather than a general anti-American policy, as authorization was being given to other publishing houses at that time.
- 14 For a full reconstruction of these translation culture wars, see Rundle (2010).
- 15 The most informative and thorough study of the impact of the regime's anti-Semitic policies on Italian publishing is Fabre (1998), unfortunately only available in Italian.

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