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A Peter Lang edition, *The Politics of Dubbing* is the 20th volume of the collection New Trends in Translation Studies, whose series editor is Professor Jorge Díaz Cintas. The 180-page book comprises five chapters focusing on several aspects the author selected as relevant in the Italian politics of dubbing.

In her Introduction, Carla Mereu Keating sets off by clarifying the aim of her book – *doppiaggio,* the Italian word meaning a post-synchronisation technique that can be either an intralingual or interlingual practice. She also elicits the difference between voice-over (or partial) dubbing and total dubbing, which some authors (e.g. Shuttleworht and Cowie, 1997) refer to as revoicing — partial revoicing or voice-over and total revoicing or dubbing. When speaking of dubbing, it is imperative to make a parallel with subtitling, since historically speaking these were the two modes of election from the 1930s onwards mainly in Europe. Nonetheless, Mereu Keating also mentions the more recent accessibility modes of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audiodescription, along with their most prominent scholars, such as Díaz Cintas, Orero and Remael (2007).

The author also describes her aim and methodology, as well as the obstacles she faced in her research, and concludes the Introduction with a summary of each of the five chapters.

1. Film Censorship and the Translation of Silent Cinema: An Overview

The first chapter is divided into five sections that delve into the status of foreign films and the regulation of their translation in Italy. It was in the first two decades of the 20th century that cinema attracted the attention of the Italian government by seeking to "control the national circulation and public exhibition of domestic and foreign motion pictures" (p. 9). Mereu Keating presents a historical curiosity in terms of censoring legislation, which is the fact that in 1889 a royal decree enabled the suspension or prohibition of public representations of theatre that could endanger morality. This tendency ensued, with more regulations in 1907, 1913 and 1914 focusing on the impressive growth of cinema houses and screenings, because "films (…) can exercise a much more deleterious corruption" (p. 10) and thus the government's need to revise every new film and prevent those which subject matters could be prejudicial to the public. Examples of these were public morality, ethics, public decency, national reputation and decorum (cf. p. 11), among others. Moreover, this increasing awareness is on par with the centralisation of this censorship process on the Ministry of the Interior, or rather on the euphemist film *revisore.*

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The second section discusses silent movies, particularly the fact that the language they used were also the focus of state control, namely by the obligation to render it in "correct and faithful Italian" (p. 12). At the beginning, silent movies were mainly short films and intertitles started appearing to perform the function of linguistic mediation, aided by the speakers or commentators (Japanese *benshi*). In Italy, these would both use standard Italian and regional dialects and could go as far as impersonating different characters and their voices. With the increase in the length of the films, translation had to be secured either by the country of production or by the distributors. However, the translation of the intertitles "was not regarded as a faithful rendering of the original meanings, but rather an adaptation or localization into different languages" (p. 14).

In the third section, Mereu Keating directs our attention to other regulations which, despite having stemmed from liberal governments, provided a model for the fascist laws on film censorship, such as those dated from 1918, 1919 and 1920. One of the 1920 decrees established the composition of the commission in charge of the censorship, which was to continue into the fascist period, though with modifications. The commission consisted of two officials, a magistrate, a mother, a member of educators or charity groups, an expert in artistic issues and a journalist. While Italian films were censored from the pre-production stage, foreign ones were also liable to visual censorship on the final product. It was in 1923 that the first fascist decree on film screenings comes out and changes are introduced into the previous model.

As far as the censorship of silent films, Mereu Keating presents numerous examples drawn from her corpus of 13,420 reports compiled from films since 1923 until 1943, especially focusing on the censorship of the verbal components. Based on these, she concludes that the reports insisted on banning taboo content either by cutting the whole part or manipulating it by replacement. Among the topics under attack, the author mentions moral social behaviours, religion, sexuality, death and suicide, nationalism (that went as far as banning the use of foreign languages in the press and public places) and neutralisation of foreignness (p. 25) and women's emancipation and rebellion.

In the last section of this chapter, Mereu Keating refers to Guglielmo Giannini's work (cit. Raffaelli, 1995) that, in the late 1920s, reflected upon the work of film translators and compared it to a creative job, in need of "cultural negotiation and artistic interpretation" (p. 29). Therefore, Giannini upheld the legitimacy of translators to freely adapt the otherness in the source text, or rather domesticate, and defended them against the accusation of riduzione. The chapter concludes with further examples of the discussion of film manipulation at the time, where Mereu Keating states that her intention was "to illustrate how the official control on films and domesticating practices on film translation affected the circulation and reception of foreign films in Italy" (p. 32).

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2. A Damaging Foreign Competition: The State and the Production of Italian Talkies Abroad

The second chapter introduces the talking films or talkies and how Italy had to grapple with an ambivalent setup of screen quotas for Italian films, whose industry was facing a production crisis during the 1920s, and the increasing importation of foreign films which the fascist government wished to restrict. These protectionist policies were also common in Germany and France.

In this chapter on foreign competition, Mereu Keating explains the different stages from Hollywood's multiple language versions to the definite Italian dubbing policy (to be developed in chapter 3). After the advent of talkies, Hollywood engaged in the versioning of English-speaking films to the European market, that is the production of "versions of the same film shot simultaneously in different languages" (p. 35), which failed because of economic and artistic reasons. Thereafter, Hollywood started dubbing or subtitling their films, according to the countries' preferences — usually dubbing was elected by countries such as Germany, France, Spain and Italy, while countries with smaller populations chose subtitling, i.e. Portugal, Holland, Denmark or Greece, without neglecting voice-over in Poland and Russia.

Mereu Keating puts forth instances of Hollywood's experiments with dubbings performed, throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the US with either Italians or Italian-American actors, neither well received by critics in Italy nor supported by the fascist government because they could hinder domestic film production, but especially due to "the 'negative cultural, linguistic and moral propaganda' regarding Italian language and traditions" (p. 45). Dubbing productions were slowly moved to Rome, but still many criticisms were made, particularly directed to the accents and diction of the actors, as well as to the exaggeration of voice acting and performance. Moreover, American dubbings disregarded the need for language adequacy, for the use of standard Italian, which was of paramount importance for "the nationalist policies of the government in matters of language usage and of mass cultural production and consumption in general" (p. 52). The author closes this chapter by making reference to two other experiments: The independent ethnic film-making originally in Italian, which was conducted in the East Coast and was to have a short life, and Italian versions produced in Joinville, France.

All in all, these "foreign-made Italian talkies" (p. 55) exported to Italy were discouraged by the fascist government, for the reasons presented above.

3. With Italian Voice and Soul: Political Involvement in the Translation of Films

The political involvement of the Italian fascist government started in the late 1920s and included not only the support and promotion of the national film industry through funding and incentives, but also the development of film schools and festivals. Between 1929 and 1933, foreign talkies were silenced for two main reasons: first, Italian cinemas were not equipped with sound systems up-to-date and, secondly, any dialogue in foreign

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languages were prohibited, thus often intertitled in Italian. However, as Mereu Keating points out, this trend could not last long, because of the popularity of sound films and the continuing technological improvements. As a consequence, in the first half of the 1930s, the necessary technical equipment was installed and found henceforth in the main urban centres of Rome, Milan or Naples.

In order to fully appreciate the underlying reasons for these policies, the author introduces social and cultural issues related to language and education, particularly standard Italian versus regional dialects and illiteracy rates, respectively. The consecutive bans on foreign languages and words were intended to support a "linguistic autarchy" (p. 63), aiming at a national unification. This was owed to the fact that Italy was a multilingual country and its citizens mostly used "dialects and regional varieties" (p. 64) when communicating. Therefore, fascist Italy sought to impose language standardisation by being hostile towards dialects and regionalisms, opposing minority languages and reacting against the foreign. These attitudes affected all mass media — the press, the radio and the cinema.

It is in light of this overall policy that the development of the dubbing industry should be apprehended, especially in Rome, where the first studio was the Cine-Pittaluga, followed by Fotovox, Fono Roma or Itala Acustica. This expansion and professionalism were not only praised by the commentators, but ultimately of interest for the government, who wished to "standardise, centralise and exploit the dubbing practice" since cinema was "intended to entertain the masses but at the same time [was] capable of exercising political, cultural and linguistic influence over them" (p. 72).

In the fourth section of this chapter, Mereu Keating attempts to explain the choice for dubbing in Italy, also due to the high illiteracy rate of the population, who would have considerable difficulties in following the Italian intertitles, not to mention that these would only partially reproduce the original. Furthermore, dubbing would also enable to impose a standard Italian language in films and then act as "a tool to educate the public in the standard pronunciation" (p. 73). Technically speaking, dubbing also allowed the synchronicity between image and sound that had been lost with the forceful silencing of foreign films and their intertitles. With the Rome studios, a motto was advertised which was "with Italian voice and soul" to emphasise not only the effort in creating truly national translations, but also "a powerful way to contain Hollywood's cultural penetration" (p. 75) and contamination. This domesticating approach was also followed by Germany, France and Spain.

As a means to support domestic film production, dubbing fees were set up as a tax on foreign films and then re-invested as "dubbing vouchers" that boosted the film synchronisation industry and its many generations of "screen translators and adapters, voice actors and directors, Foley artists, sound recording technicians and engineers, studio managers and the like" (p. 77). The "Bottai law" from 1931 established conditions for film producers to access funds, namely that the film had to be written or adapted by an Italian and that most part of the cast was also to be Italian. Later, in 1933,

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foreign films could only be screened were they were supplemented with an adaptation in Italian which must be carried out in Italian studios, allowing also for the manipulation of film content. However, the ratio between foreign and national films was not the sought-after 3-1, but rather 9-1, which comes to show that the protection of national films had been somewhat a failure.

4. Unrecorded Censorship: From Preventive Control to Manipulated Dubbings

As Mereu Keating stated in previous chapters, the fascist administration had not considered "the film censorship system" (p. 83), though it had been served well by the preceding liberal governments that paved the way to its perfection. The adjustments made included the transference of this control, in 1934, from the Ministry of the Interior to the DGC (*Direzione Generale per il Cinema*) which promoted and supported the national film industry, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. The censorship process was undertaken by a commission of five elements and, ultimately, the appeals reviewed by Mussolini himself.

In terms of the official procedures, after the script was approved preventively by the commission, the film could be applied for screening. The commission would then decide on fully approving, rejecting or partially approving, in which case they would specify the visual and verbal changes requested. Once the distributors or producers complied with the alterations, they would re-submit the film. In case of rejection, the film could only be re-applied to the commission under a different title. National films would be subject to a less strict procedure and usually need not a preventive control, whereas foreign films should be submitted with their dubbing and scripts, unless they wished a preventive permission before dubbing, in which case they would present the original version plus the translated script. However, despite these procedures, the dubbed versions had to be submitted before screening.

As also explained by the author in previous chapters, the Italian Foreign Ministry engaged in intense correspondence with embassies and consulates to ensure that foreign films, particularly from the US, would not portray Italians in a derogatory manner. In the US itself, the Hays Office (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America) also intended to "centralise their own film censorship system and standardise the regulation of films" (p. 87) and thus established the Hays Code, a seal of approval or certificate prior to the screening that all productions companies had to obtain. Nonetheless, despite apparently being on the same wavelength, some unreasonable demands were made by the Italian government, requesting that the Hays would allow access to the original pre-production screenplays, the edited materials before screening, the direct intervention in the production phase and the presence of an Italian supervisor in loco. All of these were diplomatically refused with the excuse of being physically impossible. However, the Hays was aware of the importance of heeding some of these demands, since the film industry was ultimately an economic issue and their profit depended on "not offend[ing] any nation's sensibilities" (p. 88).

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Mereu Keating then refers to three renown examples of preventive censorship of foreign films – *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931), *Scarface, the Shame of a Nation* (Howard Hawk, 1932) and *A Farewell to Arms* (Frank Borzage, 1932) – going into detail why and how these were refused or abridged so as to defend the Italianness (*italianità offesa,* p. 91) offended by the foreign stereotypes. One last case in point presented in this section is *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (Archie Mayo, 1938), whose title was changed, as well as the names of the characters Marco Polo and his assistant.

If, in the 1920s, the trend in official censorships was constant and affected 190 foreign films, in accordance with a chart presented by Mereu Keating (p. 94), the next decade seemed to relax the grip, with a mere 56 films. The author puts this decrease down to two reasons: "a more preventive interference" in foreign films and "the progressive introduction of the dubbing operation" (p. 95) that enabled an a priori manipulation of the films. Notwithstanding, Mereu Keating puts forth a number of examples that illustrate the way censors "interfered *a posteriori* with the fictional representations of political, moral and cultural taboos" (p. 96) that might have escaped previous stages of control. These encompassed, for instance, content that could lead Italians to doubt fascism and its leaders or could ignite desires of equality and social struggle, as well as references to death as murder or suicide and other moral and religious subjects. Interestingly, the author clarifies that "the Vatican had 'an alert and attentive interest' in film matters" (p. 100) and Pope Pius XI even included, in his 1936 Encyclical, that there was the need for "a 'holy crusade' against the 'abuses' of cinema" (p. 100).

In the last section of this chapter, entitled 'censura sommersa', Mereu Keating emphasises the disparity between the 1920s and the 1930s censorships and adds that in the last 5 years of the regime she could not find any indication of official cuts or substitutions in the films, which seemed to contradict "the increasing hardening of the censorship system historically documented for the last part of the dictatorship" (p. 103). However, the censorship did not ease its grip, but it was rather exercised in "an increased unofficial, hidden or invisible" (p. 104) manner for four reasons: lack of records concerning preventive control; the use of the dubbing process to censor; the decrease of foreign film importation because of the monopoly law (from 1938 that blocked the entry of films produced by MGM, Paramount, Fox and Warner Bros, and, later, during the II WW, from Anglo-French films); and self-censorship, since distributors and dubbing studios were more experienced in what was bound to be accepted or rejected and thus domesticated "uncomfortable visual and verbal passages" (p. 104) beforehand. Consequently, as Mereu Keating puts forth, there was ample room for unrecorded and unofficial censorship to be exercised.

5. The Dubbing Debate: The Translation of Films, the Press and the Public

Because of the government's censorship, Mereu Keating states that the general public could not be free to choose between dubbed or subtitled versions of foreign films. In an

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attempt to demonstrate the intensity of this debate over dubbing, the author pinpoints a number of articles that were published between 1935 and 1940. One of the magazines she mentions is *Lo Schermo*, created under the auspices of the fascist government. In his 1945 article, Attilio Fontana discusses the first Venice Film Festival where films were to be shown in their original version, only accompanied by subtitles and synopses. In line with this, the government also allowed the opening of *Nuovo Cinema alla Quirinetta* in Rome, in 1935, where films in their original version were screened for the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, enabling them an escape from dubbed cinema, though not advertising this option in the national press.

In the section dedicated to the mixed reactions to dubbing, the author refers to Virginio Pagliei's article (1935), where he criticises the dubbing operation because "the lips of the actors pos[e] to emit sounds that don't correspond (…) to those we hear" (p. 115). On the other hand, Giorgio Vecchietti (1935) attacks the fact that dubbing studios carried out their job without "any aesthetic care or professional ethics" (p. 116), despite praising the job of the translators and voice actors. As a consequence, Virginio Gandolfi (1935) comes up with the idea of organising the dubbing industry through the creation of a dubbing consortium that was to regulate the dubbing procedures and their prices. This proposal was not accepted by the government, who viewed it as counterproductive and opposing free competition.

As far as the language of dubbing in Italy (also known as dubbese by Romero-Fresco, 2006), this is an issue that has received ample discussion, namely the lack of authenticity by Raffaelli (1991, etc.) and Rossi (1999 and 2007). The obligation to use a standardised Italian accent and register arises from the need to comply with technical requirements in terms of "qualitative and quantitative synchronicity" and their artificiality results from the fact that this standard language could not offer the same colloquial and expressive traits as the originals. Because actors could not resort to regional and dialectal expressions, their dubbings "sounded rather flat and prim" (p. 119) — *insipido e incolore* — and thus unrealistic to cinema-goers. Mereu Keating delves into the details other critics of the time discussed, such as the poor quality of the translations (Raffaello Patuelli, 1936) or the educational contribution of cinema with subtitles (Ettore Allodoli, 1937). For Luigi Chiarini (1936), films were untranslatable and dubbing would compromise the work of art and disjoint the artistic unity (p. 125). However, Chiarini distinguishes between film and cinema: While, for the former, dubbing would be inevitable, for the latter the original should be shown with "'explicative' subtitles" (p. 126). In either of these, translators should be as invisible as possible and engage in an impersonal translation, in a way that "dubbing [would be] almost analogous to an informative intertitle" (p. 127).

In the course of her rather comprehensive approach to this debate, the author returns to Vecchietti who understands dubbing as "the logical tool and the natural vehicle for the circulation and the popularisation of the feelings and ideas expressed in a film" (p. 128). Therefore, film translation should be "a domestic interpretation" of what occurred in a

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film, rather than faithfully reproducing the foreign world. Another author she mentions is Corrado Pavolini (1936), who examines the upsides and drawbacks of four modes of film translation — titles, subtitles, silencing and dubbing — coming to the conclusion that dubbing was the victor. It is also worth mentioning the ubiquitous reference to the actors involved in dubbing, especially their quality and popularity, aspects highlighted by Maria Cortini Viviani (1936), Tell O'Darsa (1937) or Diego Calcagno (1940).

Finally, this last chapter is concluded with a detailed reference to a public debate that was put forward by the magazine *Cinema* through the action of Michelangelo Antonioni in 1940. Almost 240 people participated in this debate and answered the four questions proposed by the magazine, among which film critics, directors, journalists, students, among others, the majority of which favoured both subtitling and dubbing.

In her conclusion, Mereu Keating returns to the goal of her book, which was "to unveil how the translation of foreign cinema in Italy has been subject of top-down political choices driven by state cultural agenda and commercial gains" (p. 153), achieved through archival historical research she so thoroughly presented in her book. She recovers the four "legislative historical watersheds" and summarises her main findings.

All in all, Mereu Keating's book is a thorough historical approach to the introduction of dubbing in Italy, from the time of silent movies to the talkies, since the liberal government's decrees until the fascist laws, encompassing a period of approximately 40 years. Not only has she discussed in-depth the technical issues of dubbing (from Hollywood's multiple language versions to the Rome post-synchronisation studios), but she also reviewed other pertinent aspects, such the underlying political intentions in choosing this audiovisual translation mode or the way film critics and afficionados regarded dubbing.

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