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WHICH WERE THE HAPPIEST TRANSLATORS? THE CASE FOR METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM IN TRANSLATION HISTORY

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1. Introduction

This paper is a critical examination of what I consider to be problematic exclusivist leanings in recent theoretical debates and methodological proposals in translation history. These reflections on methodology in translation history are invaluable contributions to current thinking on central aspects of translation history. Just to highlight the two most recent among them, Rundle's programmatic wish list for the discipline has rekindled the conversation among historians in a field where isolated case studies abound, but research output on philosophical aspects has remained comparatively scarce (D'Hulst, 2014: 7). By the same token, Rizzi, Lang and Pym (2019: 1) consider the "conceptual foundations of translation history" and foreground the notion of "trust" as not only a conceptual tool and key to a deeper understanding of translation, in the hopes of "proposing a way forward" for the discipline. There have been numerous contributions to the corpus of translation methodology and theory, including Pym's own landmark methodological handbook of historical methodology published in 1998 and other later works by Pym himself (1992, 2000 and 2009). Other essential additions to the historiographical corpus must include works by Lieven D'Hulst (1995a, 1995*b*, 2001, 2007, 2010, 2015, 2018), Paul St. Pierre (1990, 1993, 2012), Lépinette (1997) López-Alcalá (2011), and O'Sulllivan (2012), among others. A comprehensive survey of all these works and the issues they raise for historical theory is well beyond the scope of this paper. I will chiefly limit my focus to the matters debated in the lively scholarly conversations initiated by Christopher Rundle in two special issues of The *Translation Studies Journal* (Rundle, 2012), *The Translator* (Rundle, 2014), and in a monograph in the *Benjamins Translation Library* (Rundle and Rafael, 2016). These absorbing exchanges address core epistemological and philosophical issues for the translation historian and merit more attention by the community of translation historians.

Let it be stressed that I recognize substantial explanatory potential in these refreshing methodological and theoretical perspectives. The latest historiography by Rundle, Rizzi, Lang, and Pym, for instance, is both compelling and insightful. Hence, it must be clearly established from the outset that the intent of this contribution, paradoxically as it may seem, is ultimately positive despite its critical nature. More accurately stated, its intent is dialectical, accepting as a premise the essential role of dialectical exchanges in the progress of scientific knowledge. Thus, my aim here is simply to add several additional reflections, from a critical standpoint, to the fundamental questions posed by these outstanding fellow historians hoping to keep the metahistoriographical dialectic moving forward.

I partly take my cue for my brief and provisional reflections in this paper from philosopher Paul A. Roth's theses in his 1987 book *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences*, most notably from his arguments against what he terms "methodological exclusivism" in rational inquiry, i.e. the notion that "there exists only one proper method for the social sciences" (Roth, 1987: 5). In my view, hints of such

methodological exclusivism, or monism, underlie some methodological trends in current translation history. As translation historians, perhaps we would be better served by avoiding reductionist leanings as much as possible. I feel inclined to reject exclusivism in translation history on somewhat similar grounds as Roth's: in addition to not being justifiable from an epistemological perspective, exclusivism greatly hinders the pursuit and formation of knowledge (Roth, 1987: 74), as it has the potential to place undue constraints on choice in historical inquiry (Gorman, 2007: 3, 7-10).

Two relevant provisos should be made at this point. The first, a terminological note on the use of the nouns "methodology" and "method". The second has to do with the hierarchical prioritization of my arguments and objections against exclusivism as a function of their perceived epistemological relevance. With regards to the use of the fluid and versatile term "methodology", I adopt here Meister's broad usage of the word (made extensible to occurrences of the related noun "method") in a recent article on the applicability of mixed method research to translation studies "a theoretical construct integrating philosophical and theoretical stances, inquiry logics and research methods" (Meister, 2018: 67). On the second aspect, I organize the objections in my case against the imposition of an unjustifiable "unity-of-method" (Roth, 1987: 9) perspective on translation history as first-order and second-order issues. The fundamental argument against methodological monism has already been outlined above and will be articulated throughout this essay. The set of second order, or ancillary, objections are intended to supplement and support the fundamentally negative nature of the argument against exclusivism by adding more positive critiques. Accordingly, I will refer to a series of five second-order (a list by no means comprehensive), or ancillary problems I find in some of these methodological proposals, in addition to the overarching issue of exclusivism: 1. A misrepresentation of pluralism in historical studies; 2. A fragmentary view of the object of inquiry (de-textualized and partially de-humanized); 3. Dogmatic rejection of alternative theoretical conceptualizations; 4. Unresolved tensions between general and specialist history; and 5. Narrative representation dilemmas. This paper will focus on the first two aspects.

Importantly, there is a fundamental corollary to the first-order objection above—the problem of shortened historical explanations. A monistic outlook has the potential to severely hinder what to me is a central concern of the historian: to produce meaningful explanations of the translational past. Given the incomplete nature of historical knowledge and the limitations inherent to the investigation of the past, the completeness of all historical explanations is a function, inter alia, of the documentary evidence at the disposal of the historian. In spite of this basic assumption, an exclusivist approach to doing history increases the risk of constructing what certain historical theorists have referred to as "truncated explanations" (McCullagh, 1998 and Mandelbaum, 1977).

What do they mean by truncated explanations? Historians often select the aspects of the past that interest them and restrict the scope of their inquiries, limit the range of events, agents, and causes they include in their histories. The selective nature of historical investigation is a non-controversial fact of the historian's craft. Having said that, there are epistemic risks inherent to our task of producing the best possible explanations of past events in these methodological selections, as recognized by McCullagh:

> It is common to think that the historian's personal interests also determine how far back along the causal chain they go in explaining an event. (…) On my analysis, however, to do this is to produce an incomplete causal explanation, for a complete explanation begins with the first event which made a significant difference to the probability of the effect's occurrence. Indeed I would go further and say that such truncated explanations are positively misleading, for they give the impression that earlier causes played no significant part in bringing about the effect (McCullagh, 1998: 187-188).

I would add to this concern and push it further upstream in the translation historiographical process to contend that, should our point of departure be a partial ontological view of the object of inquiry, the explanatory result is more likely to be truncated. This crucial shortcoming undermines even more any potential aspiration to universal applicability of monistic programs to all processes of inquiry into the translational past. Echoing relevant statements by other scholars writing on the subject—mainly Delabastita (1991, 2012) in translation studies and Carr (2008) and Roth (1987, 1999) in the philosophy of history, I will underline the importance of subordinating method to the specific configurations (D'Hulst, 2015) of each discrete process of inquiry, above all vis-à-vis structures of explanation. My argumentation and discussion of these issues in the sections will be based on references to the philosophy and theory of history and the social sciences.

2. Two antecedents to exclusivism: J. G. Herder and the *Rationalitätstreit*

In his 1774 essay *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* ["This Too a Philosophy for the Formation of Humanity"] German polymath J.G. Herder reacted with disdain to what he perceived as French intellectual presumption and an abstract generalizing view of history and culture. The piece would become a true manifesto of the *Gegen-Aufklärung* (Berlin, 1976/2013: 61; Beck, 1969: 362; Pocock, 1999/2004: 257; Garrard, 2011: 2-3). Hence the *Auch eine* in the title of Herder's essay, which, as noted by Forster, Ameriks and Clarke (2004: 272), was no doubt an overt and scornful reference to Voltaire's *Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765) and his generalizing history of nations and cultures from the point of view of their position in a set of linear, ideal stages of advancement toward the ultimate goal of reason and its sequela—happiness (Breisach, 1983/2007: 206).

In contrast, Herder rejected such a universal and homogenizing view of human nature and Voltaire's rationalist notion of the ideal state of a people as guided by reason. The German scientific establishment seemed to have imported French ideas about history and human nature uncritically. As Herder puts it in his *Auch eine Philosophie*, "a learned society of [the] age" had "doubtless with high intentions" established the question for an essay contest as "Which were probably the happiest people in history?" (Forster, Ameriks and Clarke, 2004: 296; Mah, 2002: 146-146). Espousing a brand of historical relativism with the individuality of peoples at its core, Herder refused to accept the premise of the question and argued that such comparisons between *Völker* were unfeasible, let alone undesirable, as every human society had had its own unique sense of happiness and bliss. (Forster, Ameriks and Clarke, 2004: 297-298).

For our purposes in this essay, we must turn again to Isaiah Berlin for his appraisal of Herder's contribution with his critique of the Enlightenment concept of history. According to Berlin, the value of the Herderian legacy is to be found precisely in his "rejection of absolute values, his pluralism" (Berlin, 1976/2013: 207, 208). Berlin continues:

> If Herder's view of mankind was correct – if Germans in the eighteenth century cannot become Greeks or Romans or ancient Hebrews or simple shepherds, still less all of these together – and if each of the civilizations into which he infuses so much life by his sympathetic Einfühlen are widely different, and indeed uncombinable – then how could there exist, even in principle, one universal ideal, valid for all men, at all times, everywhere? (Berlin, 1976/2013: 208-209).

The core philosophical assumption in the Western tradition that Herder contributed to shake with his genetic method, with his focus on inner history rather than on traditional political and military history, was, still in Berlin's view, to call into question European confidence that "problems of value were (…) soluble, and soluble with finality" (Berlin, 1976/2013: 207-208).

Next in this brief survey of antecedents to my case against methodological exclusivism in translation history, it is useful to refer again to Paul A. Roth's *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences*. With his starting place in a nuanced reading of W.O. Quine's skepticism vis-à-vis objectivity and Mill's opinions on liberty, Roth articulates his position regarding rationality, human behaviour and standards of inquiry. For Roth, the quarrel over rationality (*Rationalitätstreit*) between advocates of the natural sciences element in the social sciences and the unity-of-method thesis ("the thesis that there is just one method of inquiry proper to the physical and social sciences"), on one side, and what he terms the "undoers" (those for whom the understanding of human behaviour hinges on the discovery of social rules or conventions shared by humans) is indeed a "fruitless and pointless" debate (Roth, 1987, 2-3, 4). Instead, Roth's aim is to suggest a "more fertile approach", the suggestion that "social scientists do best by adopting" what he calls "a pluralist view of rational inquiry" (Roth, 1987, 5). Roth's "methodological pluralism" has patently negative roots. As he himself defines it, methodological pluralism "is just the denial of methodological exclusivism", as we "cannot make sense of the notion of 'one proper set of rules' that defines the study of human behaviour" (Roth, 1987, 5). His vision for the social sciences is to see "accounts of explanation finally free of the last vestiges of the positivists' unity-of-method thesis", which he rejects (Roth, 1987: 5, 73-74). There is, after all, a positive side to Roth's arguments, and it ties back to Stuart Mill's ideas of liberty and freedom, since the type of methodological pluralism Roth propounds in *Meaning and Method* "maximizes opportunities for humans to exercise freedom of thought" (Roth, 1987: 82). Roth's achievement in *Meaning and Method* is to provide what until then was the "best available philosophical defense of the project of social science" (Turner, 1990: 255) as he engaged in an exploration of alternative views of rationality (Roth, 1987: 9, 73-74). In the next section, I outline some of the most relevant contributions made of late to the ongoing discussion concerning methodological and theoretical aspects of translation history by selected translation historians to the recent debates concerning methodological questions facing the historian.

3. Methodological and theoretical trends in translation history

The arguments put forward by Christopher Rundle in his 2012, 2014 and 2016 contributions can be summarized as follows:

> In order to achieve the academic/professional "enrichment" of genuine "interdisciplinary engagement" with non-translation scholars (Rundle, 2014: 2, 7), obtain "new insights" (Rundle, 2014: 4), and provide an undistorted view of the specific higher-level (beyond translation-as-an-activity) events in history (Rundle and Rafael, 2016: 30), translation historians must adopt a more suitable method for translation history, which involves...
>
> a) a reversal of epistemic priorities with *history-through-translation* as the object of inquiry, instead of *translation-in-history* (Rundle, 2012, 232-240), touching on matters of evidence, the raw material, the bedrock of translation history: authors, texts, translators, etc. Rundle and Rafael further develop this view of translation as a sextant with which to better navigate the past. Both scholars explore the cross-fertilization potential of translation as "a concept, an interpretative key, an approach to a specific historical moment in which language and cultural exchange play a particularly significant role. (2016, 25: 45);
>
> b) a distancing from translation studies methodology (Rundle, 2012: 233), chiefly through the avoidance of analysis of translated texts and translator biographies (Rundle: 2010*b*, 4), and
>
> c) the discarding of translation theory and translation theory-laden discourse in historical narratives (Rundle, 2012: 234-235) and its replacement with the "specific discourse of [their] chosen historical subject (Rundle, 2014: 3).

My case for methodological pluralism in translation history in this essay partially echoes a similar call by Dirk Delabastita in a 1991 paper where he rightly identifies a growing chasm between theoretical translation studies and what he terms "observation in historical reality" and illustrates how translation researchers mask the apparent contradictions between theoretical constructs and translation phenomena in history (Delabastita, 1991: 149). In a time where the perceived chaos and fragmentation of the field was of concern, Delabastita made an argument for a less restrictive view of translation and for scholars to entertain an open-minded outlook and lend consideration to alternative explanations and theories in translation studies. In a similar vein to the view articulated here that method should become secondary to the overarching goal of inquiry — chiefly to description, understanding and explanation — Delabastita eschews the adoption of foreign concepts and data into one's work on defensive grounds and advocates placing explanatory power and description as the overarching goal (Delabastita, 1991: 139).

Granted, Delabastita's main intent in that paper was to address the disconnect between theoretical work carried out in the field (what he saw as empirical, descriptive translation reality) and the description of discursive strategies employed by scholars to blur such disconnects. My purpose here is restricted to translation history as a subfield, but Delabastita's invocation of Gideon Toury's accurate description of three-tiered relations between translated texts and their originals (more in particular, Toury's level of potential relations) is right on point. Delabastita highlights the fact that "most theories" of translation to date had been "theories of (what is allegedly) the only legitimate or genuine kind of translation" (Delabastita, 1991: 142). This assertion underscores monistic views of translation which are definitely pertinent to characterize Rundle's brand of methodological exclusivism which points at the allegedly genuine kind of translation history. Furthermore, Delabastita's acknowledgement of the "opposition between 'theoretical' and 'historical-descriptive' approaches", which he saw as "in principle mistaken" (Delabastita, 1991: 140-141), would be germane to the discussion launched by Rundle years later vis-à-vis disciplinary borders, discursive choices and epistemic priorities.

In his response to the 2102 position paper by Rundle, Delabastita starts by conceding the given that there is an "intrinsic tension between history and translation studies" (Delabastita, 2012, 246). Nevertheless, he differs from Rundle in his assessment of such opposing forces, a tension that which for Delabastita is eminently positive, given the potential it affords for deeper historical insights. And it behooves the scholar to maintain such dialectic. When Rundle discusses the goal of history in terms of specifics and then highlights its incompatibility with the search for universal laws and recurrent patterns in Translation Studies—he really means in Descriptive Translation Studies, but Theo Hermans discusses that misunderstanding in more detail in his response below—Delabastita again sees compatibility and interdependence. He argues that it is precisely in the contrast between the "irreducible specificities" and "the background of recurrent features" that the former become starkly visible for the historian (Delabastita, 2012: 246). Besides, Delabastita argues for the relevance of Translation Studies theories and discourse which, by means of its specialized metalanguage, makes visible for researchers "other

plausible lines of action" that actors could have pursued "but finally didn't" (Delabastita, 2012: 246). Crucially, and again tying nicely with my purposes here, Delabastita rejects Rundle's attempt to establish irreconcilable differences between two seemingly opposed narratives—*translation-in-history* and *history-through-translation*. For Delabastita, both perspectives constitute a "single complex narrative," capable of yielding "findings equally interesting and meaningful" (Delabastita, 2012: 247).

As I point out in the next section, and partially informed by Roth's methodological pluralism, I agree with Delabastita's pragmatic view that criteria of usefulness should guide the design of research projects and the theoretical frameworks employed. Delabastita does not care much for unnecessary compartmentalization, "counterproductive" and "needless" boundary making. Importantly, Delabastita concludes his critique of Rundle's paper by re-emphasizing the complete interdependence between translation and history. He is also right in asserting that "no translation exists outside of history", as he is to call for "thorough historical contextualization" of translation research combined with expertise in translation studies paradigms and theories (Delabastita, 2012: 248). By way of emphasis, this paper connects with Delabastita's pragmatic outlook regarding usefulness, or what I would label as suitability for specific explanatory purposes. As seen above, I deem that theoretical frameworks also ought to be a function of inquiry and explanatory objectives, to echo David Carr, who, like Delabastita, also writes "in good pragmatist fashion" and asserts: "conceptual frameworks are meant to serve inquiry, and not the other way around" (Carr, 2008: 28-29).

For his part, Theo Hermans's examination of the positions taken by Rundle revolves around three main areas: First, the scope of Descriptive Translation Studies and the interface between DTS, translation studies, and History. Second, the aims of translation history, with a critique of Rundle's constructed dichotomy of research objectives. And finally, the nature of the object of study in translation history, notably the singular/specific dichotomy and historical knowledge. What interests me in this essay is Hermans's pluralistic leanings. A fundamental point of departure for Rundle's argument is his equation of DTS and Translation Studies, and Theo Hermans takes issue with such disciplinary synecdochism and blurring of lines, which he deems "unwarranted" (Hermans, 2012: 243). Hermans sees DTS as part of a broader, much larger, line of descriptive approaches to the study of translation. Moreover, Hermans seems to espouse a rather inclusive view of disciplinary boundaries as far as Translation Studies is concerned. For him, TS would include "anyone, of whatever persuasion, with a scholarly interest in any aspect of translation" (Hermans, 2012: 243). If accepted at face value, such a liberal view of discipline boundaries also undermines another starting point of Rundle's position paper, notably, the mindset of "us" (translation scholars) versus "them" (historians), which betrays a rigid understanding of watertight research communities. Hermans likewise contends that the paradigm, which he tentatively terms 'descriptivism' or 'functionalism,' happens to inform "the vast majority of historical research" with its research agenda aiming at studying translations as they are in a given context, as well as "the ends they serve and the effects they trigger" (Hermans, 2012: 243). All in all, it is true that Hermans shares Rundle's mistrustfulness vis-à-vis potential contributions of DTS to a diachronic study of translation phenomena, but he parts company with Rundle at a crucial juncture—what Hermans regards as a contrived dichotomy between fundamental research agendas. For Hermans, both are intimately related since "without a knowledge of the history of translation we cannot understand translation in history" (Hermans, 2012: 244). He is right in that last assertion, but the tension is real and, as Bandia points out (Bandia, 2014: 113), it remains to be seen in practical terms how to go about the desired fusion of both perspectives into a single, comprehensive narrative whole.

Crucially, nevertheless, Hermans leads his discussion of Rundle's references to selected postmodernist thinkers to the methodological component of history and in so doing quotes Hayden White's reference to the New Historicists resorting to history so as to glean insights on literature, only to find there was no "specifically historical approach" (White, 1989: 302, quoted in Hermans, 2012: 245). On the basis of this idea of the alleged absence of a *sui generis* historical method of knowledge acquisition, Hermans argues for a flexible and open approach to whatever perspective one decides to adopt, be it "history, translation, history of translation or translation in history", researchers should enjoy latitude to "work on it in more ways than one, and the insights gained may benefit more than one community" (Hermans, 2012: 245). In this direction, and more recently, Lieven D'Hulst has reminded us that the perspectives and degrees of interdisciplinarity adopted by translation historians should not be an a priori assumption, but that they will largely be the product of an "intellectual DIY" ("*bricolage intellectuel*"), and will require constant adaptation on a case by case basis, as dictated by multifarious and changing historical configurations (D'Hulst, 2015: 286). Granted, this avoidance of academic dogmatism and the accompanying display of methodological suppleness certainly provides fertile ground for uninhibited interdisciplinarity and productive scholarship, so my overall impression thereof is a positive one. And it also informs my argument for methodological pluralism in this paper, which will be developed further in the next section.

4. The case for methodological pluralism

Loosely based on Roth's own case for pluralism in rational inquiry into human behaviour, and at the risk of giving in to the very dogmatism I seek to avoid (Roth, 1987: 5-6), my argument for methodological pluralism can be spelled out as follows:

> *Methodological pluralism* is the negation of methodological exclusivism and can be understood as the basic premise that there is no single better method for inquiry into the translational past.

Given the obvious negative nature of the Roth-based argument above, it behooves one to attach additional statements to characterize the pluralistic stance with positive elements. The following points encapsulate what I consider some fundamental premises, or suggested core fundamentals of a more holistic view of translation history methodology. The topics they address are a preview of the second-order objections I will list and expand upon in the final sections of this contribution:

> • The object of inquiry in translation history is translation as general category, but located in the past. Translation can be more holistically understood as a multidimensional (at least three-dimensional) construct made up of human agents (authors, translators and other human beings involved in translation events), texts (original or source texts and their translations), and translation-related events (lower-level or translational-level or higher-level or contextual events). Some historians may be interested in one or all facets and the choice should be open to expand or restrict the scope of the object, but in a situated recognition or acknowledgement of its complex, multilevel structure.
>
> • The primacy of choice of methodology and choice of facet (or facets) of the multidimensional object of investigation the historian wishes to adopt and pursue dictates that it should not be a default imposition motivatedby philosophical or disciplinary allegiances.
>
> • Method should be subordinated to each discrete process of inquiry. And the principal aim of the process of inquiry in translation history is the explanation of subjectively selected aspects of the translational past or translation-in-the-past.

Without losing sight of the fundamental problem I find with the agendas or trends for translation history described above —showing traces/signs/leanings of methodological exclusivism—I include in this section a list of four secondary issues which serve as a positive extension of the negative anti-unity-of-method argument spelled here. As explained, the constraints imposed by methodological monism on freedom and choice in the pursuit of knowledge about the past are the fundamental issues that motivate its negation. As positive extensions to the intrinsically negative point of departure of the first-order objection and rejection of methodological exclusivism, I provide an arbitrary list, by no means comprehensive, of second-order concerns I find most pertinent to my critique of Rundle's proposed prescriptions for translation history:

> 1. A misrepresentation of the dynamic state of the historical studies. The discipline of history offers a more pluralistic landscape in philosophical and methodological terms. By the same token, I consider monistic proposals agendas for translation history take us back to dated monistic debates like the nomothetic-ideographic controversies and the postmodernist-modernist strife surrounding historical investigation.
>
> 2. The fostering of a fragmentary and incomplete notion of the object of inquiry in translation history. Crucially, and as previewed in the introduction, some methodological decisions advocated by historians like Rundle touch upon the very ontology of translation. In a more specific way, they may end up contributing to "de-humanize" and "de-textualize" translation histories, thus diluting a constituent part of what translation is. As mentioned before, I would rather look at the object of inquiry in translation history more holistically, namely as a tripartite *explanandum* which includes human agents related to translation acts (especially translators themselves), translation-related events, and, importantly, translated and non-translated textual artefacts. The facet of the object that historians freely opt to foreground in their studies will be a function of their interests, their theoretical framework of choice and the questions they seek to answer, but without explicitly losing sight of the overall ontological structure or substance of the object under scrutiny.
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> 3. Related to item 1 above, the monistic view constrains, by virtue of the biases and theoretical prejudices it vehicles, the work of the historian, especially as regards

conceptualization (theoretical frameworks) and the gathering and interpretation of evidence. Most notably methodological exclusivism achieves this undesirable state of affairs by its fixation on summarily excluding potentially productive theoretical frameworks informed by translation studies, regardless of their potential usefulness and explanatory power for a given historical project.

4. Finally, methodological exclusivism does not solve satisfactorily—though it rightly acknowledges—the tensions existing between general and special histories, between the study of higher-level past events and translation-related phenomena and artefacts. The direction one takes in addressing this important tension affects all phases of historical inquiry.

I will focus on the first two second-order objections in this part of the essay and will link them to the problem of producing explanations of selected aspects of the translational past. As far as methodological exclusivism goes, I have already pointed out my belief that a monistic outlook has the potential to severely hinder what to me is the central preoccupation of the historian: to produce meaningful explanations of those elements of the object of inquiry he or she chooses to survey (see McCullagh's quote above).

4.1 Methodological pluralism in general history

To buttress his critical stance of a translation history framed through translation theory constructs (chiefly among them those informed by Descriptive Translation Studies, as noted above) Rundle briefly invoked philosophers of history like Hayden White and Paul Veyne (Rundle, 2012: 234). In his response to Rundle summarized above, Hermans cited White to argue that, in historiography, the singular and the specific are linked in the historian's interpretation and emplotment of historical sequences in familiar narrative types. For Hermans, this interpretation is inevitably linked to the historian's own philosophy of history (Hermans, 2012: 244-245). A discussion of the nomothetic-ideographic debate, with its well-known dichotomous placing of the specific and the general, lies well beyond the scope of this contribution. What I find compelling for my purposes here in Rundle's resort to the postmodern side of the historical debate is what it reveals and implies regarding the drive to impose a single methodology in translation history. First, it attempts to present a partial, monolithic view of historical studies and, as a corollary, it indirectly contributes to foster a similar monistic stance on translation history. And it does this rather paradoxically, since the postmodernism movement, seen as an anti-realist current which called attention to the fact of the failure of language to match reality (based on the fact that there is no autonomous reality for it to match) "suggests unlimited freedom of choice in the context of what to believe about reality, and hence what people understand reality to be is a contingency" (Gorman, 2007: 9). And because Rundle's agenda projects an underlying exclusivism which negates this "unlimited freedom", it also takes us back to dated, monistic and sterile debates held between philosophers and practitioners of history.

In all fairness, Rundle does not explicitly negate in his paper that other stances or schools of thought in historiography may be equally (or more) relevant to the study of the translational past than postmodernism, but he does not assert this either. Nevertheless, the omission of any other contrary views to those of postmodernism in support of his agenda contributes, in addition to the substance of his programme, to present a narrow and incomplete picture of historical studies. Underlying that partial view I perceive the monism of a unity-of-method notion of rational inquiry in general and of knowledge of the past in particular. Moreover, and leaving any alleged applicability of selected postmodernist notions to Rundle's 2012 advocacy for a break up with translation theory in translation history, I take issue with his misrepresentation of the complex web of historical theory and the blurring of what I see as the possibility of a more pluralistic corresponding landscape for translation history. If one is to look to historical theory to inform the writing of translation history, there is no compelling or productive reason to arbitrarily silence the pluralistic reality of that general historiography. Historical studies is not as monolithic and narrow as one could be led to think reading Rundle's arguments based on postmodernist notions as if they were the governing perspective in history. Such a one-sided invocation of historical theory also has the potential effects of dragging translation history back to monistic assaults on how historians should go about approaching the past. If historical theory is to be a model of any sort for translation historians, it behooves them to look at the fuller picture of the discipline. As a case in point, the prolific champion of postmodern historiography Alun Munslow has identified and described no less than three different epistemic positions taken by historians which determine how historians "take control of the past": first, what he labels as "crude reconstructionism or unreflexive 'modernist' approach"; second, "positivist-inspired (...) position defined as constructionist or 'late-modernist' history"; and third, what he terms "deconstructionist history". Naturally, Munslow's own answer to the question: "what is the most appropriate epistemological position for historians to adopt today?" (Munslow, 2014, 4-6)

lands on the third option and variegated forms of skepticism directed at all "historical descriptions, including those of particular events" (McCullagh, 2015: 98). For the present, I am not inclined to answer that important question other than with the anti-exclusivist counter-argument spelled above, as well as by aiming my own skepticism at any potentially monistic answer. Munslow and the narrativist adherents of postmodernist history have continued to pursue the deconstructionist route. Conversely, those who object to radical postmodernist postulates regarding the impossibility of truth in historical descriptions have either dismissed its skepticism as a passing fad or, building upon the awareness it raised among historians and philosophers vis-à-vis the role of narrative structure and the importance of language in historical representation, have attempted to develop "more sophisticated" theories of truth in history (McCullagh, 2004: 5). Indeed, these paradigms seem to be alive and well in historical studies, moving forward as much undeterred as misunderstood by the others, but all integrating the "collective 'controversies'" (Fulbrook, 2007: 67) that so enrich the field. An attempt to impose an exclusivist agenda on translation history by invoking notions from one particular school of thought in historical studies while muting what the other paradigms have to offer seems unjustifiably arbitrary and contributes to blocking alternative routes for translation history. I have in mind the equally acceptable methodological option of emulating the existing plural landscape and methodological dynamism that I see in historical studies for our approach to the study of the translational past.

Besides this potentially misleading picture of historical studies as a postmodern monologue of sorts implied in Rundle's essay, I submit further that his methodological reductionism takes us back to markedly outdated debates in historiography like the well-known struggle between Hempelian deductive-nomothetic and ideographic perspectives. At its core, this was a debate about claims to truth and knowledge in the social sciences and essentially revolved around the alleged validity of a single method of rational inquiry into human behaviour, in our case, past human behaviour and the justification of the knowledge resulting from that method of inquiry. The nomological paradigm inspired in the natural sciences and law-based explanation famously espoused by Hempel in his breakthrough article *The Role of General Laws in History* (1942). In just a handful of pages, deductivist K. G. Hempel set out to describe what he considered to the "correct model of explanation" (Roberts, 1996: 1), one based on so-called covering laws (hence its nomological designation) mimicking the natural sciences. Its promise of objectivity and reliability would make of the Hempelian model all the rage in certain historical circles seeking to a solid scientific foundation to bolster claims to objectivity and truth in history, only to implode due to its grave "formal [and explanatory] failings" (Roth, 1999, 249; 252-254). Much like the defenders of the law-based Hempelian notion of historical investigation, any programme espousing the better way to do translation history takes us back, in my mind, to infertile and futile debates marred by prescription and reductionism. The falling short of Hempel's covering law model of historical explanation was not only the failure of an attempt to impose the logic of hard sciences upon historical investigation with little explanatory punch, it was also the falling short of an attempt at imposing a monistic view of the paths leading to knowledge and truth in history.

The next and final section deals with the closely intertwined aspects of object formation, theoretical conceptualizations of that object and explanation as exemplified in Rundle's engaging research on translation in Fascist Italy.

4.2 Methodological pluralism and the Ontology of translation

As noted earlier, a crucial aspect of Rundle's latest articulations of his notion of translation history is his prescription for historians to adopt an epistemic reversal with regards to their object of investigation. As noted above, Hermans and Delabastita underplay the negative role in such a tension and see complementarity between both paradigms. In 2012, Rundle contended that approaching general history through translation and writing the history of translation "are not as compatible as they may seem" as research aims. For Rundle, this is due to field boundaries and differing methodologies (2012: 233). I acknowledge the inherent tension existing between a *translation-in-history* and a *history-through-translation* paradigm, but I am not convinced that a resort to exclusivism consisting in doing away with choice by proscribing one of the paradigms and elevating the remaining alternative as the better way is a justifiable answer.

Four years later, Rundle pressed on the issue of incompatibility. Guided perhaps by his pressing concerns with target audience, expertise, or perhaps driven by pragmatism, Rundle has wished for historians to focus on what translation, which he vaguely re-defined as an "interpretive key" (Rundle and Rafael, 2016: 25), can reveal about historical structures. Indeed, in Rundle's programme translation is reduced to an epistemic tool, an optical instrument of sorts, through which historians should look around the landscape of history. In line with my main negative argument in this paper, Rundle's prescribed epistemic move suffers above all from methodological exclusivism, although it is worthwhile to note at least the most salient and far-reaching implications of such an epistemic reversal. I will limit my

comments here to three of them: **a.** an incomplete view of the object of inquiry (already previewed to this point in some measure); **b.** the de-textualizing of the object of inquiry by a deliberate choice not to read and/or analyze translated texts, and **c.** a break with the sociological turn in translation studies by insisting on de-humanizing the object of investigation through the deliberate exclusion of translator from analysis, description and narrative accounts. A reiteration of the hierarchized problematization which characterizes my case for methodological pluralism is in order at this point. The real difficulty here, in my view, does not lie so much with the sequelae of Rundle's choices *per se* (though relevant, these are second-order concerns in my negation of exclusivism) as with the actual prescription of such methodological choices to the discipline as a whole as the *better* way to pursue translation history (the first-order, or primary concern).

Let us then turn our attention to the three corollaries of the implementation of Rundle's programme in his own study of translation in Fascist Italy. The first problem cited is the dilution of the intrinsic complexity of the object of historical investigation itself, and the other two, hinge on it. To my mind, it is true that, in general terms, the object translation historians seek to understand is, much like their general history counterparts, the past (Munslow, 2014: 3). But the domain of translation historians is "special", not "general" history (to borrow Mandelbaum's nomenclature). A crucial differentiating factor distinguishing general and specialist history is the preoccupation of the latter with "culture", understood "as a generic term designating whatever objects are created and used by individuals and whatever skills, beliefs, and forms of behavior they have acquired through their social inheritance" to the exclusion of historical structures and institutions. For Mandelbaum, the "generic term" *culture* encompasses "language, technology, the arts, religious and philosophic attitudes and beliefs, and whatever other objects, skills, habits, customs, explanatory systems, and the like are included in the social inheritance of various individuals living in a particular society" (Mandelbaum, 1977: 12).

This domain separation between general and specialist history ties nicely with the problem of de-textualization I alluded to earlier. In ontological terms, translation history deals with "cultural entities" of a particular kind, mainly translated texts. It is precisely from translated texts and the associated human stakeholders, that translation history derives its *raison d'être*. More on the human factor later. It would then stand to reason that historians would not wish to neglect the human and social factors associated with these peculiar textual artefacts. But Rundle decides to refrain from analyzing translations. This choice serves his purpose relatively well and I find it justifiable under certain conditions, as I will explain below. Tellingly, however, in the prolegomena of his excellent monograph *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy* he reveals that his overall purpose does seem to depart from the professed emphasis on the "history-through-translation" stance he would advocate later in the series of theoretical papers: "I am interested in how translation became a political issue and the attitudes toward translation that the debate which surrounded it, particularly in the 1930s, reveals" (Rundle, 2010*a*: xvii). Importantly, Rundle admits that his research did not involve a close reading of translations, even though the interest in that analysis is acknowledged:

> For the reasons outlined above, I shall not be examining the individual translations. Although it is clearly of interest to look closely at individual texts and look at ways in which the translators' work was affected by the political climate in which they operated, my intention is to focus on translation as a publishing phenomenon, rather than a literary one. From the perspective I have taken in this study, the question of translation takes on a very different character; and it is clear from the research I have done, that this was also, on the whole, the perspective of the regime itself. With a few exceptions, the regime was not interested in the individual texts which were being translated, and did not take the trouble to censor most translations closely (Rundle, 2010*a*: 4-5).

Rundle justifies his rather atypical decision to avoid any semblance of textual analysis in a monograph on historical translation resorting to a shift in his understanding of the object of inquiry from literary to a publishing phenomenon. He also points to his interpretation of the perspective he attributes to the Fascist regime with regards to translation in order to explain his own look at translation as an abstract aggregate of published literature chiefly confined in the research to descriptive statements and quantitative representation in statistical tables. Quite understandably, such "text-free" methodology in a translation history project could be met with skepticism by other historians interested in the insights that textual analysis can yield.

Moving on to the next problem it is useful to underline the interface between text and agent in the investigation of the translational past. Jacquette emphasizes that human component of cultural production when he defines "cultural entities (...), products of human thought that are touched and transformed in various ways by human hands, (...) [including "expressions of thought in language and art" (...) "objects that would not exist as complexes (...) were it not for human intervention" (Jacquette, 2014: 265-267). These non-natural cultural entities fall under the purview of translation history, either

as concrete, specific texts subject to close reading and analysis, as stand-alone artefacts, in comparison with so-called *original* artefacts, as collections of artefacts, or as abstract entities approached at a surface, conceptual level. Rundle's model seems to push translators themselves to the background, not excluding the notion of translatorial agency from view altogether in his picture of the past, as anti-humanist, text-centered views of translation would dictate. See for instance Tyulenev and his critique of sociological translation studies: "More often than not, translation studies turn into translators study. We wage battles in order to make translators visible (…) because it is a history of translators, not of translation, that we write" (Tyulenev, 2010: 165-166). Rundle does not radically exclude the human element from translation history as Tyulenev does. By contrast, Rundle's model emphasizes peripheral agents as groups, it foregrounds collectivity and purposefully dims the central figure of the translator in his historical accounts. The introduction to the edited volume *Translation under Fascism* states: "We do not trace the fortunes of individual authors in translation for their own sake" and reminds readers that the authors "do not consider translation to be a personal, individual affair", but take for granted their nature as "active interventions into texts, brought about by multiple agents with multiple interests" (Rundle and Sturge, 2010*b*: 4).

A strictly text-centered view of the object of inquiry like the one Tyulenev espouses (in Rundle's case, macro- and micro-textual analysis are excluded altogether) combined with the blurring of the social and subjective appears to me to be open to the risk of incomplete explanations. It may provide useful insights still and should be permissible under a pluralistic view. But I tend to see in my own work on the history of translation in the Western United States that a holistic view of the object of inquiry and of the interplay between human experience and agency, text analysis, ideology, events and structures surrounding religious translation of Mormon sacred texts in the late 1800s and early 1900s has provided me with a fuller picture of that historical locus than could have been achieved otherwise and with a different set of choices (López-Alcalá, 2014 and forthcoming). To my mind, the most important unresolved tension in this regard is how to effectively approach the task of narrative representation of translation histories if the goal (as advocated by Rundle) is to achieve true interdisciplinarity by reaching audiences beyond the disciplinary confines of translation studies. As pointed out elsewhere, Paul Bandia remains skeptic as to the real ability historians have to mesh both perspectives in a single narrative (Bandia, 2014: 113). I think this is a fundamental unresolved tension between translation history (as topical or specialist history), and general history, that still needs to be addressed by historians.

But how do these choices work for Rundle in the context of his own research projects? Are they justifiable in explanatory terms? Admittedly, and under scrutiny from other historians (especially those expecting to see thorough textual analyses and overt application of translation theories), such explanatory structures may appear incomplete or susceptible of offering more insights if pursued in more textual and humanist directions. Be it as it may, a willingness to consider with an open mind the exercise of epistemological agency by historians who seek to generate adequate knowledge about their chosen object of investigation is an essential feature of methodological pluralism. As a self-contained project of inquiry, I submit that Rundle's choices (even at the expense of muting textual and central human or social aspects of the object of inquiry) still yield worthwhile results in terms of description and understanding. But the risk of producing unnecessarily shortened explanations of translation events is ever present, and such partial explanatory structures could result, in part, from self-imposed constraints closely linked to the methodological choices examined so far.

In above-referenced works *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy* and *Translation under Fascism* Rundle conceptualizes translation both as a corporate activity (a lucrative business of the Italian publishing industry) and as an abstract cultural phenomenon freighted with national, ethnic and political baggage: a "means of exporting Italian culture", a "form of cultural expansion", a "misguided indulgence", "form of uncontrolled cultural exchange (...) a kind of cultural miscegenation" (Rundle, 2010*a*: 114, 209). And elsewhere as "a means of understanding how the regime viewed itself and how that view of itself was constructed" (Rundle and Sturge, 2010*b*: 42). Thus conceptualized, Rundle can then survey translation against the backdrop of historical structures (the Italian Fascist regime, the Ministry for Popular Culture, the National Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Italian publishing companies, the Translations Commission, the Authors and Writers Union, etc.) and selected agents (translators excepted) like famed publisher Mondadori, Alessandro Pavolini (chairman of the National Institute and minister at the MCP), Dino Alfieri (Pavolini's predecessor at the MCP), the Union's president F. T. Marinetti, etc.

If we follow Harré and Madden's postulate vis-à-vis the intrinsic causal power of things, as cited by McCullagh (1998: 178-179), we can see a potential epistemological justification for Rundle's process of inquiry, even in the absence of any in-depth analysis of textual artefacts and the potential interventions of human agency and subjectivity. These choices result in important limitations, as Rundle himself acknowledges, but it is also true that the historian can still gain compelling insights within such parameters, but I insist this comes about *only* within the limits of a particular project and within the confines of *its* discrete research design. According to Harré and Madden, it is possible to ascribe causal

power to a thing by virtue of the nature of that thing: "'X has the power to A' means 'X (will)(can) do A, in the appropriate conditions, in virtue of its intrinsic nature' (...) X will or can do A, in the appropriate conditions, in virtue of its intrinsic nature (Harré and Madden, 1975: 86-87, cited in McCullagh, 1998: 178). As mentioned above, any historian will admit that the nature of the thing (translation in our case) needs to be theorized, conceptualized by the historian herself as that such conceptualizations are not inherent to the object of inquiry. Only then is Rundle able to state that X [translation, as he understands it] can do A [whatever effects are attributed to translation in this particular research project], in the appropriate conditions [context] in virtue of its intrinsic nature (Harré and Madden, 1975: 86-87). This is feasible with relatively meaningful insights, even if the nature of the thing is not thoroughly described through deep analysis of the thing itself. All that would be needed for an ascription of explanatory power would be to believe that such descriptive analysis is indeed possible:

> (...) but because the nature has not been specified we do not have to spell out the nature or constitution of the subject in detail to have an adequate power-ascription. One is not called upon to perform the analysis of the thing or material to be justified in ascribing a power. In order for it to be proper to ascribe a power we need believe only that it is in principle possible to ascertain the nature of the subject (Harré and Madden, 1975: 92).

Thus, a historian of translation in this case could be justified in ascribing explanatory power to a notion of translation if only theorized at a very basic level (or not at all) and in the absence of in-depth textual analysis. Such an analysis could be aimed at uncovering the mechanisms whereby that thing (translation) has the power to bring about an effect or series of effects, or to increase the probability of them occurring and not others (McCullagh, 1998, and Scriven, 1966: 245-255). But all we need within the limits of inquiry set from the outset in this project is a verification of the power ascribed to translation (or in reverse, such powers could indeed be ascribed after examination of documentary evidence surrounding the act and products of translation in the historical period in question) in what Harré and Madden define as "a dual-criterion process" (Harré and Madden, 1975: 93).

The presumed powers of translation for cultural miscegenation, the potential for importation of subversive ideas, or just as a symbol of cultural dominance in an international cultural war (computed as statistics in a sort of cultural balance of trade) are verified by Rundle from the historicized point of view of selected agents (not translators) in the sources. As a side note, let us not forget the limitations and thus the risk of truncated explanations inherent in these epistemic choices. Rundle seems to admit as much when he asserts that "it is very difficult to be sure of the extent to which the instructions given were actually followed and the efficiency with which the regime carried out the sort of supervision that it was officially supposed to be managing" (Rundle, 2010*a*: 20). This is the sort of research question that may require an examination of a corpus of translations in order to identify, *inter alia*, choices made by translators in the course of their work and in an attempt to link them to norms (a notion which incidentally I feel underlies Rundle's investigation of translation in the Italian totalitarian regime, as a fact of a target culture, but which he succeeds in leaving unnamed for obvious programmatic and presentational reasons). This is just an example of the potential for truncated explanations that I have referred to above as an offshoot of epistemic choices similar to the ones Rundle advocates.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have surveyed with a critical eye several positions maintained in recent contributions on translation historiography regarding basic methodological aspects of translation history and articulated my negative view of the methodological exclusivism I perceive in such programmes for the discipline. I have made a case for methodological pluralism in the study of the historical past, mainly as the rejection of exclusivism, but also as a way to preserve freedom and choice in history, inspired by Paul Roth's arguments for pluralism in the social sciences. As beset with difficulties as such monistic choices may be, I have attempted to frame them against the backdrop of the pluralistic perspective of historical inquiry I am advocating in this paper. That historians enjoy freedom of choice in their pursuit of knowledge about the translational past is worth protecting and celebrating as an a priori, even before looking into the justifiability of his specific explanations and conclusions. Regarding the application of a given methodological paradigm by a given historian to her own investigations of the past, I contend that beyond the limits of her own research design (from selection of the theoretical framework to the formation of his object of inquiry to the research questions, the selection and interpretation of the evidence, the construction of explanatory structures and his presentational choices in narrative form), such methodological choices involving the formation of the object of inquiry, de-textualization and de-humanization of that object are not necessarily exportable to the discipline as a whole, and certainly should not be an imposition on it by default. Despite its potential shortcomings and virtues, the first-order concern for me must be the attempt at prescription and generalization inherent in its methodological exclusivism, and hence my negation of it in this essay. As recognized by Gorman,

"historiography (…) is shot through with choices" (Gorman, 2007: 4) and, in my view, it is important to ensure it remains that way. Historians should be able to explore ways to, not only answer the question "Which were the happiest translators?" but also to problematize the very question as well.

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