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### **Book review**

## **The Epistemological Value of Histories of Translation**

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The history of translations in Romania does not have a long track. But owing to the position of the country at the juncture of so many cultures, there are spectacular phases to reckon with. Many indexes and theoretical works have been dedicated to the translational enterprise in Romania, but only in 2021 was published a majestic synthetic and comprehensive at the same time *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română din secolul al XX-lea. Domenii literare și nonliterare*, Editura Academiei, 2021 (*A History of Translations into Romanian in the 20th Century. Literary and Non-literary Fields*). The coordinators of this massive collection of contributions (Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica and Titela Vîlceanu) made use of chronological and thematic criteria in organizing the scientific content. The intention of this article is to study the critical and valuing approaches the authors displayed in developing their research. How objective and illuminating this synthesis is? What will the Romanian culture benefit of it?

In the *Foreword to A History of 20th Century Romanian Translations. Literary and non-literary fields*, ITLR (*O istorie a traducerilor în limba română din secolul al XX-lea. Domenii literare și nonliterare*), volume I, Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela Vîlceanu (coordinators), Editura Academiei

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Române, Bucharest, 2021, a volume of 1400 pages, Mircea Martin reminds us that the act of translation can be linguistic or nonlinguistic, but does not offer the established term, intersemiotic translation. He then moves quickly into the area of postcolonial studies, with its well-known ideological and political subcomponents. Thus, he discusses less translation procedures and the recent history of their application in the Romanian space, but more the "war" ("the zone of translation is a war zone", Emily Apter) between cultures and the power-marked interface of the translator increasingly involved in establishing canons and negotiating between domains (ITLR 2021: 22). Using Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida, the theorist questions the hospitable archetype of different languages and ends up in considerations on cosmopolitanism and nationalism (*Ibidem*: 25).

After highlighting the role of retranslations in a world driven by trends, ideologies and technologies (which is by no means complexity), Mircea Martin takes a step back and warns against the often vulgarizing rewriting of original texts. Rather, translation should capture unnoticed potentialities of a text in "new social-political and cultural contexts" (*Ibidem*: 28).

The author of the *Foreword* also discusses Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay on the "task of the translator". Here the emphasis is on writerly creativity, on the unimportance of reception for authorial intentionality, and on that *intentio* which translation should render with care. Even discursive linguistic mimesis, in the sense of translation, is not highly valued. *Intentio* is given the sense of *revelatio* of a pure original language rooted in all languages.

From this point, Mircea Martin starts a *laudatio* of "great translations", for example *Faust* translated into French by Nerval, to the delight of Goethe who found it more attractive than the German original. Benjamin's idealistic occultism concerning the "reconciliation and fulfilment of languages" (31) gives the literary theorist the opportunity to praise the zone of indeterminacy "between languages", the "space of negotiation and elliptical complementarity" (*Ibidem*: 32) visible especially to translators. Also in an idealist key, the purpose of translation would be to overcome "the paradox of languages, and therefore untranslatability" (*Idem, Ibidem*).

Mircea Martin notes that this history is an integrated one, resorting to a multi-perspectival approach: linguistic and literary, sociological, statistical tools, etc. What is very important: "Far from being merely descriptive, enumerative, and constative (... this history, *our note*) is analytical and critical, theorizing and contextualizing, including a history of translation studies, of comparative literature, of literary history, of Romanian culture as a whole" (*Idem, Ibidem*). As the coordinators note, such a history includes both the evolution of language registers in the period under study and aspects of the culture and civilization concerned (*Ibidem*: 36).

In *Introduction*, Ovidiu Morar places great emphasis on ideologies and politics in literary translation. He notes the placement of the sign of equality between the legionary and communist regimes (which literally razed the elites and the ethos of Romanian civilization). The Communist Party had been banned as early as 1924, but

operated underground without much trouble. A large space is also given to the avant-garde, represented above all by ethnic Jews, who numbered 800,000 in Romania.

It is shown that after 1989 (*Ibidem*: 58) the translation perspective has changed in the sense of a shift from the national to the global and from Harold Bloom's "Western canon" (which refers more to selection criteria) to "peripheral" literatures and underrepresented authors, i.e. an ideological restructuring of the former aesthetic canon. The geographical reorientation of the translators, according to political coordinates, is also noted (*Ibidem*: 67).

Rodica Nagy provides an excellent summary of the history of literary language as a starting point for the diachronic reception of translations.

As expected, a lot of French literature was translated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Interestingly, this was not necessarily a prestigious activity, so the first translations of the Balzacian novel *Eugénie Grandet* and the light-hearted *Fromont & Riesler* by Alphonse Daudet, realized by Constantin Şăineanu are signed under the pseudonym 'Marius'. Garabet Ibrăileanu translated Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* under the pseudonym "C. Vraje". A T.A. translates Alexandre Dumas's novels *Jeanne de Neapole (Jeanne de Naples)*, in 1898, and *Vaninka*, in 1899, as well as the Voltairian *Zadig sau Ursita (Zadig ou la Destinée)*, 1899, and Gaboriau's *Căsătoria din glumă (Les Mariages d'aventure)*, 1899.

The volume is organized according to the languages and cultures from which it was translated into Romanian, in particular. The space does not allow us to detail all the translation efforts or their authors, nor would it make sense to list them here.

It is worth noting that the status of the translator has become increasingly prominent in the post-communist era, but this is also the case in the capitalist world. Publishers have also specialized and acquired various experts. An interesting case is that of the Military Publishing House (Editura Militară), founded in 1950, which, in addition to military content, also opened up to literature for fiction. Also interesting is the case of non-literary translations in the press which did not mention the translator, not even in the newspaper "Scânteia", which in the 1980s became the main propaganda tool of the Communist Party. The same happened in the case of a magazine with pretensions like "Magazin istoric" (Silvia Blanca Irimiea, 92).

### **The history of translation is also the history of (self)-censorship, the history of fear**

A fascinating aspect is the balancing act practiced by translators in order not to go beyond the ambit of vocabulary and phrases imposed by the multilaterally developed socialist state specializing in generalized censorship and control ("Censorship in the Communist period: translations and the problem of the foreigner").

Censorship has existed and exists in all times and in all societies, regardless of regime. The pretext has been to protect the population, which indicates an infantilizing approach. However, the more secular the state becomes and the more the education system aims at profitability, the more censorship is intensified for various reasons. What is happening in some Islamic states does not contradict this point of

view, as an anti-religious religion is imposed there, devoid of spirituality and obsessed with ritualism. Infantilized populations seem to justify statist interventionism. In our country, censorship was made official by the ruler Mihail Șuțu, the "reigning censor" who targeted any possible offence against the sovereign. In 1840, Mihail Kogalniceanu's "Dacia literară" was suspended for reproducing the proverb "The fish from the head is eating the fish". In the 20th century, following the Soviet model, censorship will attack not only the writings but also their authors (Laurențiu Vlad 2002: 23, in ITLR: 99). Ioana Macrea-Toma (2009, in ITLR: 100) shows that after the so-called abolition of censorship in 1977, it was in fact tightened by assimilation into institutions.

The current censorship would rely on "the art of metamorphosis and a poetics of transformation of the original" (ITLR 2021: 101) to achieve greater readability of the work in the target language. The author wonders whether this process of empathy is more a matter of self-censorship than censorship. An insidious self-censorship because it comes from within. Danielle Risterucci-Roudnicky (2011:355, in ITLR: 101) points out that the cultural mediator who is the translator tries to avoid ideological "obstacles" in the translated text so that it can be admitted into the receiving culture controlled by who knows what despotic regime. Thus, in a twisted way, a falsified *Intentio lectoris* disregards the *Intentio operis*.

Communist political correctness imposed expurgations from the 1985 translation of Émile Zola's *Contes à Ninon*. Translator Silvia Burdea removed many pages from *Médéric's Discourse* because of similarities with Romanian situations. Similarly, because Ceaușescu had close relations with Hosni Mubarak, the president of Egypt, the Egyptian conflict between the Blues and the Greens is relocated to the Sahara Desert. Ioachim Botez, the translator of *Les aventures prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon*, de 1872 de Alphonse Daudet, *Minunatele isprăvi ale lui Tartarin din Tarascon*, 1970, Ion Creangă Publishing, omitted the use of the adjectives *evreiesc, iudaic, jidăn* (Jewish, Judaic, Judaeen).

The brutal communists not only kept themselves demure, but they also sold them as holy. In countless translations „dracul” ("devil") is replaced by „naiba” ("damn") (*Ibidem*: 105). The prudishness is noticeable in Romulus Vulpescu and Ileana Vulpescu's translation of Rabelais's famous *Gargantua & Pantagruel*, where all the savory obscenities of the original are simply removed. In addition to the mutilations, some works could not even be considered for translation: the novels of the Marquis de Sade, Frédéric Dard (San Antonio), or André Gide's *L'Immoraliste* (*Imoralistul*) (see Anda Rădulescu).

In 1941, Field Marshal Antonescu issued the "Decision on the censorship of the press" („Decizia relativă la censura presei”), but in 1942-43 much was translated mainly from Anglo-Saxon literature, although until then translations from French had dominated.

In 1945, the "9-10/1945 List" („Lista 9-10/1945”) appeared, which aimed to withdraw some publications. In the period 1944-1948, 8779 works were withdrawn from circulation (Petcu, 1999: 167; Burlacu et al. 2005, in ITLR:110). After the 1948

Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party a booklet of banned books was published. As such, many writers become translators, but translations from the Soviet space also increased.

These are just a few observations on this massive synthesis which, beyond its scientific and taxonomic contribution, shows us that we have no reason to feel uneasy about Western cultures. This would help us not to ideologize traductology and its applications, as is increasingly the case in more ancient civilizations.

### **Translations, bilingual editions, philological editions**

As for proper names, it is claimed that some are translatable, others are not. Entering "into discord with a co-text which is henceforth heterogeneous to it" (Barbara Folkart: 1986, 237, in ITLR 124, translation mine), the "unique referent" once assumed in <<plein-champ>> translation studies (Froeliger, 2015: 21), would respect customs and usages according to which they are translated or not. For example, translating the name of the Maupassant's character Georges Duroy as „Gheorghe al Regelui” ("Gheorge of the King") would be ridiculous (ITLR 2021: 124).

In the last two decades of the 20th century, the idea of preserving the strangeness of the translated text is imposed and this is visible in the collection „Romanul secolului XX” ("The Novel of the 20th Century"), "Globus" from Univers Publishing House.

In the case of Jules Verne's novel *Le Château des Carpathes*, the translators have endeavored to recover the authenticity of the somewhat distorted patronymics and place names.

### **A case in point and conclusions**

The deeds of translation are wonderful, but as they cannot all be mentioned in this article, I will highlight the ethnically interesting case of a translator of Petrarch's lyric, Lascăr Sebastian (1908-1976), pseudonym of Sebastian Salmen, playwright and journalist, an avowed communist, translated Petrarch's sonnets into hendecasyllabic, like his predecessors, and didn't bother with rhymes either. Confessing his lack of knowledge in metrics, he said he focused on the inner rhythm and musicality of the sonnets and their poetic content and ideas. Despite the metrical flaws, this translation achieves a noble musicality and tone in the Romanian language (929), also succeeding in reproducing the imagery of the rhetorical figures used by Petrarch. The lexicon is neither antiquated nor folklore-oriented. Thus, it turns out that first of all it is necessary to understand the source text, to understand its spirit, which not everyone can do. The ideal would be to combine these two qualities: literary knowledge and the subtlety of translation strategy, but this combination is often only a wish. (Iulia Cosma authors this section).

The project of this *History of 20th Century Romanian Translations. Literary and non-literary fields* is a grand and extremely useful one. This synthesis also demonstrates that the tradition of literary and cultural translation is very rich in Romanian culture, even if Romanians are foreign language speakers, given that their

entire history is marked by economic and political migration, caused by catastrophic rulers and unfavorable geopolitical contexts.

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