

## THE WORLD LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSLATIONS

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*Abstract: The subject of this paper is in which way the translations complete the theme subject of debate in every issue of the academic journal of comparative literature and cultural studies – “Acta Jassyensia Comparationis”. The aim of the analysis is not purely linguistic, but I had the intention to highlight the fact that also the translations, very important in comparative area, follow the contemporary orientation – the incorporation of the fiction in cultural-anthropological studies. The fiction supposes expressivity and explores known or unknown world by the translator. If he is capable to enter in the tension of the text, the results are convincing.*

*Keywords: fiction, mother tongue, source text/foreign language.*

The “comparative literature” syntagm supposes that of ‘universal literature’, initially having as an intermediary the syntagm ‘general literature’ – the first manner to compare various literatures of the world with the instrument of literary theory as universal language of hermeneutics. The access to the literatures of other linguistic spaces is achieved, most times, through translations, because “il est impossible d’acquérir la connaissance passive de toutes les langues européennes. Il faudrait faire un choix, en vertu de critères qu’il ne m’appartient pas de définir ici et qui seraient d’ailleurs souvent d’ordre personnel. Il faudra donc toujours et inmanquablement passer par la traduction” (Wuilmart 144); the maternal language becomes the main work instrument, although knowing other languages is necessary for the access to the original text; however, except for translations, access to the original text is limited, thus a comparatist has to have the direct experience of other cultural spaces. To remake a text through translation grows to mean, ever more, to remake a bookishly transposed world because world literature has become part of cultural studies, hence a good rendering of content implies knowing or inferring cultural specificity. The translator’s relationship with the source text must be a living one, beyond denotation, in the deep layers of connotations: “quand l’expression métaphorique s’étend au niveau de la phrase, du texte ou de l’œuvre tout entière, la traduction devient un phénomène complexe qui suppose des compétences lexicales, mais aussi narratives et culturelles. La capacité du traducteur de «peindre» dans la langue d’arrivée la fraîcheur de «l’autre monde», le monde de la langue source, s’avère être cruciale” (Aştirbei 24). Translations from a foreign language into a maternal one constitute the main material of translators and comparatists who should have access to good quality texts: “C’est pour cette raison aussi que les nuances autant

que les passions ne s'expriment jamais avec autant de justesse que dans cette langue dite maternelle, qui plonge ses multiples racines, ses complexes diverticules, dans le vécu profond, dans les synapses et "dans les tripes" de celui qui la parle... C'est pour cette raison enfin que l'on ne peut traduire bien que dans sa propre langue, fondement même de la déontologie de la traduction" (Wuilmart 142). These texts, able to reconstitute in all their articulations an individual or collective image – especially collective (imagology already being a domain inherent in comparative literature, transferred from the sphere of humanities), moods, emotional states from a certain space and time for which the field of philology – are a basis opening up onto other domains of knowledge and artistic manifestation: "Toute langue est l'avatar sonore et écrit d'une culture qui s'y décante dans de multiples strates: les plus évidentes étant la grammaire, les phonèmes, la mélodie, les plus subtiles étant l'implicite, l'imaginaire collectif, la gestuelle révélatrice d'une attitude culturelle mentale commune" (Wuilmart 142). Besides specific articles, studies, and the section dedicated to book reviews, many comparative literature publications have a section dedicated to translations; analysis of themes of the texts chosen for translation indicates correspondence with the general orientation of the journal and the manner in which the journal situates comparative literature studies.

The Translations section (issued along with no. 6/2008) of the "Acta Iassyensia Comparationis", founded in 2003 in Iassy by the Comparative Literature Department from the Faculty of Letters from the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, constitutes the analysis material of this paper. The Translations section from the journal is in line with the general orientation of the publication, self-defined as "academic journal dedicated to the interdisciplinary studies stimulated and justified by the universality of the literary phenomenon in its close connections with the other arts and related humanistic fields, such as cultural anthropology, the history of ideas and mentalities, cultural and gender studies" ([http://literaturacomparata.ro/Site\\_Acta/index.html](http://literaturacomparata.ro/Site_Acta/index.html)); the translated fragments belong to domains other than fiction, nevertheless being framed by the journal's theme of each issue. Each translation is accompanied by a presentation of the original text's author, a general presentation of the source text from which the fragment is extracted (in the case of long works), and analysis of problems posed by the translation from a linguistic and stylistic point of view, considering the fact that "the ideal to achieve complete equivalence is a chimera. [...] There is no perfect synonymy within the same language, thus why should anyone be surprised that there is no perfect synonymy between languages?" (Bell 24). The journal has a multilingual, pluri- and interdisciplinary aspect and it is oriented towards framing comparative literature in the larger frame of cultural studies and cultural anthropology.

The general theme of the journal's issue no. 6/2008 is the dichotomy *Rational/Irrational* (*Rațional/Irațional, Rationnel/Irrationnel*), thus the subjects are from various domains of literature (SF, *fantasy*), mythology with or without religious implications in the modern sense of the word, psychology and philosophy. In the preliminaries of the article *Three Sacred Texts in Elvish Idioms* – J.R.R. Tolkien, in Györfi-Deak György's translation, here the translator speaks about the difficulty of understanding the significations of the fragment from the text, of the so-

called *quenya* and *sindarin* idioms created from the Finnish language, known to Tolkien from his reading of *Kalevala* in original. Speaker of Hungarian, which is related to Finnish, the translator manages to enter the significations of some words which may seem created for mere exoticism. The translation of the “elvish hymn” is carried out based on the English version, nevertheless consulting the *sindarin* version, thus all variants appear at each line: *sindarin*, English, Romanian. H.P. Lovecraft’s *The Nameless City*, translated by Mihaela Cernăuți-Gorodețchi, similarly inscribes into the theme of the volume through the gothic fantastic; the translator brings explanations regarding the semantic field of negative sensations in the description of the sudden invasion of the narrator-character’s life by the irrational, the ample footnotes nuance and explain some of her options, because “Shifting from one language to another by definition means to modify structures. Moreover, these differing forms express meanings which can not totally coincide” (Bell 24). In *The Deacon’s Death* by Dragi Mihajlovski (Macedonian writer of Aromanian origin), fragment translated by Nikola Vangeli, it narrates an episode of the Macedonian (and Aromanian) Bitola’s invasion by the Turks. This Turkish invasion from the fourteenth century and the way in which characters relate to historical events are presented as a web of negative, irrational forces which become rational through religion, everything being the result of lack of divine intervention as punishment for imagined sins, divine absence which leaves room to the manifestation of Velzevut. Jean-Luc Outers’ *A Conscientious Librarian*, in Petruța Spânu’s translation, is a homage to the world of books encompassing the real and the fictional, the rational and the irrational, the only reference point invested with full trust by generations.

Number 7/2009 has its frame-theme *Smile and Laughter (Su)râsul, Le (Sou)rrire*, the articles pertaining to the same area of cultural studies. The translations from this issue tackle the topic from different viewpoints: *G. K. Chesterton and the Definitive Sense of Humour*, translated by Claudiu T. Arieșan, mirrors old and modern comedy from a philosophical perspective within the antinomy Humour/Seriousness. Jean Jauniaux: *The Robe*, translated by Petruța Spânu, is a text representing the very author’s formation as a linguist and cineaste, therefore a master of a scientific code and another, artistic one, using the construction material of the language together with the detail technique specific to visual arts with a tone of saving humour. Branislav Nušić: *Autobiography* – fragment, translated by Nikola Vangeli: the text belongs to one of the important Serbian dramatists of Aromanian origin, often compared with I. L. Caragiale. Translator Nikola Vangeli, himself Aromanian from Macedonia, graduate of the “Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje is a good knower of the local spirit.

Number 8/2010, entitled *Other Worlds (Alte lumi, Autres mondes)* has a more consistent section of translations; the very object of comparative literature is constituted by bookish worlds in contact, perspectives of tackling the theme ranging from interior to exterior worlds, from the real to the fantastic ones, so that the thematic area of the translated texts reflects various portrayals of the world. From the allegorical, mythical-religious sphere of the early Middle Ages as transition between the pagan and the Christian world, it forwards another life model, nevertheless preserving tokens of antiquity’s pantheon of gods: Prudentius: *Psychomachia* –

fragment translated by Mihai Baltag, who, through the footnotes, offers explanations of cultural dimension for a better understanding of the text's translation; *An Account of the Marvellous Worthy Kingdom Antangil*, fragment translated by Mihaela Cernăuți-Gorodețchi, is part of a French utopia from the beginning of the seventeenth century, after interiorizing the humanistic experience; the cultural-scientific explanations from the footnotes complete the access to understanding the context of the translated fragment. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle: *The Blazing World*, fragments translated by Mihaela Cernăuți-Gorodețchi, are part of the only feminine utopia of the seventeenth century which, in a novel-like construction, combines natural philosophy with realistic observations camouflaged in the fantastic, the author being a forerunner of the SF genre. Joseph Hall: *Mundus Alter et Idem (Another yet the Same World)*, fragment translated by Constantin-Ionuț Mihai, is another type of allegory, the description of a *mundus alter* by means of satire which is moralizing, rationalist, specific to the seventeenth-century utopias; the fantasy of popular beliefs is part of the ethnic dimension of a community as a world: *Tamasi Áron and the Fantastic World of the Szekler Village* in Györfi-Deák György's translation. The insertion of the psychology in literature, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, creates the possibility to explore the abyss of human nature explaining maturity age options in a ludic tone; Jacqueline Harpman: *Cookies*, in the translation of Petruța Spânu. Oscillating between two worlds: that of the native country, Macedonia, troubled by ex-Yugoslavic wars on the one hand, and the saving western exile, on the other hand, is transposed in postmodern codes facilitating a grafting of the adoptive space on his traditional universe: Goran Stefanovski, *Theatre*, fragments translated by Nikola Vangeli; extremely important explanatory footnotes are present here also, in the context of translations for a good understanding of the mentality and culture of a certain space and time. The same theme of migration and double identity in imagining one's own world appears in Jasmine D'Costa's work *The Guest at My Grandfather's House*, translated by Diana-Lavinia Bumbaru; the Indian-born author who immigrated to Canada imbues her work with the Indian experience, which gives originality to her writings by evoking an exotic space, ordered by ancient customs and beliefs.

Number 9/2011 - *Masks (Măști, Masques)* nuances the rapport utopia/dystopia, reality/fiction, ranging from concrete masks with accentuated symbolic character, extremely old in world cultures, to the geminating human nature investigated with the instruments of psychology and philosophy. Fragments from *The Circus* by Ivo Andrić, translated by Nikola Vangeli, are representative of the relationship essence/appearance, life as a show, beyond which troubling dramas, life and death stories hide, always the same but on ever newer social backgrounds. Babits Mihaly's [Gas Masks](#), in Györfi-Deák György's translation, presents a dystopia in tune with the war generated dehumanisation, a vertically built world as alternative to the lost world and its poisoned remains; similarly, it discretely ironizes feminism. Edward Gordon Craig, *A Note on Masks*, translated by Mihaela Cernăuți-Gorodețchi, is a small camouflaged cultural history. Pelham Grenville Wodhouse's *Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!*, translated by Petruța Spânu, is a ludic picturing, nevertheless a little sad, of deteriorating human relationships,

of mock communication. There is a symbolical gliding from the human into the animal world, individuals live in strongly individualised worlds which communicate only at formal level.

Therefore translations round off the journal's theme forwarded for debate in each number, in the spirit of multidisciplinary; the aim of my analysis has not been a strictly linguistic one, I have set out to underline the fact that translations, essential to the field of comparative literature in general, follow the contemporary trend of inserting fiction in the cultural-anthropological field, at the same time adapting to this remodelling, similarly being a way to know the world: "Translation, when seen as the final act in the play with mirrors that is the essence of literature, is much more than a tool for discovering others. In its own way, it constitutes a periphery, for it must draw near, not collide; explore, not lay bare; touch, not alter. It is born of an attraction that, unceasing, sustains its course; it seeks the effect beyond the meaning; it listens to someone, more than to words. And translation is playful — more faithful to movement, hiatus and tension, than to appearances — and it is seduced, almost in secret, by the fragile presence, unpredictable and ethereal, of ambiguity" (Jolicoeur 4). The mirror-function of translations is stronger in the field of fiction than in other domains, which firstly claim rigor and not expressivity, and which sometimes explore worlds directly or indirectly known, and sometimes unknown to the translator or to the reader; if the translator experiences the tension of the text while translating it, the result is a convincing one.

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