Translating vs. Rewriting during the Romanian Communist Period – Prefaces to Translations of *Vanity Fair* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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Key-words: *Romanian communism, translation campaign, censorship, manipulation, the Manipulation School, Victorian literature, rewriting, preface*

The communist regime represented a turning point in the evolution of the Romanian translation standards. The communist state, the fundamental patronage source in the Romanian cultural space, created the necessary prerogatives for the initiation of a new translation campaign. It was the principle of quality in quantity that dominated the post World War II translational project. Historical facts like the communist 'mass-culture' together with the educational reform and what Dimitriu calls 'the fashionable concept of world literature' (2000: 185), i.e. a most beneficial need for foreign literary values, created the proper context for providing many high quality translations.

The publishing houses' translation campaign focused on providing qualitative translations to an eager Romanian public. The 'preliminary norms' of the time stipulated that translations should be undertaken by highly competent professionals. Rodica Dimitriu (1999, 2000) tries to objectively recompose the Romanian communist translational system, focusing on primary causes and their natural effects, highlighting the necessary link existing between the need for quality and quantity in translation and the engagement of the best translators who responded to the challenge. Thus Dimitriu explains that the quality of translations in the communist years was guaranteed, in the first place, by the fact that it was literary critics as editors and members of editing boards that closely monitored the translational output in publishing houses. The necessary effect was the fact that translations had to be readable as if they had been Romanian original texts, fulfilling 'the condition of literariness according to the norms of Romanian culture' (Dimitriu 2000: 187). This was possible, Dimitriu further argues, because translators were writers and critics themselves. A new generation of professional translators of English literature became involved in the communist translation campaign, comprising highly gifted graduates of philological faculties, professors, philologists, writers like Dan Duţescu, Leon Levițchi, Mircea Ivănescu, Petre Solomon, Antoaneta Ralian, Frida Papadache, Dan Grigorescu, Ticu Arhip, Andrei Ion Deleanu,

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Elena Herovanu, Petre Solomon, Ana Popescu, the famous Romanian poet Lucian Blaga, Eugen B. Marian, Petru Creţia etc.

The State, as the unique patron in communist Romania, was directly involved in the translational campaign peculiar to this period. This was a form of undifferentiated patronage, to use André Lefevere's concept (Lefevere 1992: 17). The Party provided all the necessary financial resources for the propagation of culture, just as long as the latter did not offend the communist ideology. All cultural products were deviously manipulated with the support of an all too efficient tool – censorship.

1. The status of translation during the communist years in Romania

The communist period brought major changes in Romania, as far as translation is concerned. There was a strong desire to align to modern standards, to accommodate most valuable foreign literary works, allowing thus the Romanian public to get a glimpse of highly praised world's literary masterpieces. Literary critics and historians claimed in loud voice the need for the Romanian literary (and political) authorities to allow the circulation of an all too necessary world's cultural capital[1], as André Lefevere put it (1998). An intense translation campaign was consequently initiated. In the light of these facts, we will try to provide an overview of the preliminary norms that prepared the translation boom in communist Romania.

The pre-communist period had been rich in translations too, but their quality was rather poor. Rodica Dimitriu (2000) provides an in-depth analysis of the regime of translations in the communist years and also in the period preceding them. Dimitriu reports that the reason why a considerable part of the pre-communist corpus of translations was qualitatively unacceptable was precisely the fact that translation standards at the time were not quality-driven, but market-governed. The private publishing houses represented the main patronage[2] institutions, to put it in the terms suggested by André Lefevere, within the Manipulation School. They conditioned the translators' activity, providing the necessary economic resources for the translational projects. That is why cheap unprofessional translators were preferred to experimented professionals, who obviously were too expensive to afford and too hard to manipulate. Quite understandably, pre-communist translators did not have their names written on the front page of the translated books. Another unfortunate consequence of the almost exclusively commercial criteria that governed translation regime, Dimitriu further states, were the strict page length limits that were imposed on the translators, given that it was imperative that direct translations from French should not exceed 120 pages. It is, in fact, what Romanian literary critic and historian Gelu Ionescu proves, when briefly presenting, in his book *Orizontul traducerii* (1981/2004), a series of statistical data regarding the translations that were undertaken before and after 1945. He used for his survey the

[1] In Lefevere's view, *cultural capital* refers to the information a person has to hold in order to be part of a particular social group: 'Cultural capital is what makes you acceptable in your society at the end of the socialisation process known as education' (Lefevere 1998: 42).

[2] According to Lefevere, patronage is defined as 'the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature' (Lefevere 1992: 15).

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files of the Academy Library of the Socialist Republic of Romania, which showed that 80% of the collections that had published translated literature until 1945 preferred volumes of 120 pages at the most, while after 1945, volumes of translated literary works usually amounted to 300 pages (1981/2004: 36). The direct serious effect was the fact that whole sequences were cut off from the original texts, in translation – especially the 'dull' ones, as Ionescu claims (1981/2004), the end-products being most of the time inarticulate and incomplete. Thus, the authors' original creations were re-created, re-tailored in a completely arbitrary way. Moreover, texts to be translated were selected randomly, the reception of many foreign authors being considerably affected.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, a vivid interest was manifested in communist Romania towards reading books. However, for ideological reasons, poor quality original literature was published, whereas pornographic literature was obviously banned. Under the circumstances, the largest majority of the unprofessional Romanian reading public had no choice, but to read good translated literature, ignoring the 'official' literature, i.e. the one 'ordered' by the Party. Going to the theatre and reading books became an answer to social frustrations. Popular editions and even luxury editions were cheap and, even though the printed copies were quite numerous, books in stores were sold out quite rapidly. Rare books were sometimes used as exchange currency. After 1950, a great demand for good (translated) books was noticeable: 'A numerous new public wants to read and a mass cultural life requires translations', reports Ionescu (1981/2004: 33). But books were not always easy to get, so the need for translations implicitly increased, all the more so since the Romanian public was no longer as well-acquainted with foreign languages (others than Russian) as it used to be in the pre-communist years.

The publishing houses undertaking a thorough activity of translating foreign literature in communist Romania were Univers Publishing House (the former Editura pentru Literatură Universală Publishing House), with its quite unexpensive collections: 'Romanul secolului XX' ('The 20th century novel'), 'Globus', 'Poesis', 'Orfeu', but also the publishing houses that edited both Romanian literature and translations from foreign literature, i.e. Minerva Publishing House, with another cheap collection, 'Biblioteca pentru toţi' ('Everybody's Library'), Albatros Publishing House and Cartea Românească ('The Romanian Book') Publishing House. The setting up of a publishing house that was specialized in translations, i.e. Editura pentru Literatură Universală ('World Literature Publishing House'), which later on became Univers Publishing House, together with the *Secolul 20* ('The 20th Century') magazine, which was, in its turn, dedicated to translations, marked 'the institutionalization of an action which had gone, in principle, beyond the amateurism and the occasional that had dominated the attitude towards translation for decades on end.', to put it in Gelu Ionescu's own words (1981/2004: 34). From the point of view of Toury's so-called preliminary norms (1995: 58), the aim of these publishing houses was to create a corpus of translations from the world's fundamental literary works and to form a group of translators that should have been able to cope with the complexity of their endeavor.

The publishing houses translation campaign focused on providing qualitative translations to an eager Romanian public. Preliminary norms consequently foresaw

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that translations be undertaken by highly competent professionals. Important information regarding the translators' status during the communist period in Romania is provided by Rodica Dimitriu (1999 and 2000). She tries to objectively recompose the Romanian communist translational system from primary causes to natural effects, highlighting the necessary link existing between the need for quality and quantity in translation and the engagement of the best translators who responded to the challenge. Thus Dimitriu explains that the quality of translations in the communist years was guaranteed, in the first place, by the fact that it was literary critics as editors and members of editing boards that closely monitored the translational output in publishing houses. The necessary effect was the fact that translations had to be readable as if they had been Romanian original texts, fulfilling 'the condition of literariness according to the norms of Romanian culture' (2000: 187). This was possible, Dimitriu further states, because translators were writers and critics themselves, and, as Gelu Ionescu puts it, in many of the cases, they had to translate given that they were forbidden to write, 'a "positive" effect of an unfortunate situation' (1981/2004: 33). However, a new generation of professional translators became involved in the communist translation campaign, comprising highly gifted graduates of philological faculties, professors, philologists, writers like Dan Duţescu, Leon Leviţchi, Mircea Ivănescu, Petre Solomon, Antoaneta Ralian, Frida Papadache, Dan Grigorescu, Ticu Arhip, Andrei Ion Deleanu, Elena Herovanu, Petre Solomon, Ana Popescu, the famous Romanian poet Lucian Blaga, Eugen B. Marian, Petru Creţia, Sorin Mărculescu, Radu Lupan, E. Marian, Vasile Nicolescu, Aurel Covaci, Mihai Miroiu, Mihai Spăriosu, Andrei Brezianu, C. Abăluţă, Ştefan Stoenescu, Vera Călin, Antoaneta Ralian, Paul. B. Marian, D. Mazilu, Henriette Yvonne Stahl, Petru Comărnescu, Ionel Jianu, Ioan Comşa, Constanţa Tudor, Ion Frunzetti. In communist Romania translation became a highly respected and a well-paid job. Ionescu reports it in the following words: 'today (…) the art and profession of translator has a literary and social status in its own right' (1981/2004: 47).

If before 1945, a translator's name never occurred on the cover of a translated book, in the second half of the 20th century, translators began to have their voice heard in a more consistent manner. It is true that their status could have been a better one and what is known as the translator's ontological invisibility could have been limited to a theoretical discourse on translation. Translators remained rather invisible after 1945 too, given the fact that the communist corpus of translations did not reveal many translators' prefaces, notes and commentaries. They were expected to translate in a highly literary manner so that the end product should have resembled a Romanian literary text. However, this was done with an eye on keeping intact the signature of the original author, i.e. the spirit of the source text. In order to achieve this, translators had to remain in the shadow, their names on the cover of the translated book not stirring much interest among the readers. Rodica Dimitriu ranks the translator's textual invisibility as one of 'the fundamental norm(s) at the time' (2000: 188).

Not too many studies of translation criticism, in which normative statements should be easily identified, are detectable for the Romanian communist period. The reasons which, as Dimitriu hypothesizes, contributed to this situation regard, on the

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one hand, 'the difficulty and length of the undertaking as such' and 'a certain lack of scientific rigour in selecting the criteria of evaluation', on the other (2000: 188-189). However, the translators' choices were commented upon in journals and magazines like *Secolul 20*, *Tribuna*, *Cronica*, *Contemporanul* and *România literară*.

The seriousness of the translational projects, the translators' commitment, the explosion of inexpensive world literature books on the Romanian market created a new mentality with regard to translation and the translators' work. Translation, thus, mattered a lot in the communist years. But what were the socio-political auspices under which translations were undertaken during the communist period in Romania? In other words, what were the main constraints operating upon the translators during the communist years? In what follows, an insight will be provided into the translational activity peculiar to the historical sequence under investigation, using the perspective of the Manipulation School on translation.

2. Translation as manipulation in communist Romania

The scholars' group operating under the name of Manipulation School envisaged translation as a vital component of the receiving culture. For Theo Hermans, for instance, who is the editor of the volume *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation* (1985), 'from the point of view of the target literature, all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose' (Hermans 1985: 9).

However, sensitive points were touched in a consistent manner by André Lefevere. For Lefevere, translation and translators hold a different status compared to the images projected until that moment within the Translation Studies scholars' community. He brings forth the behind-the-courtains of the translational phenomena in the sense that translations are illustrated as the end product expression of historical, ideological, economic, literary and linguistic constraints of the receiving linguacultural spaces. According to him, translations are not just equivalent texts of the source texts, at least not in the initial sense of equivalence. Translations cannot be transparent, just as translators cannot afford to be the impartial, neutral, ethical intercultural mediators that tradition depicts them to be. In André Lefevere's view, translations are manipulation tools, making of translators manipulation agents. The scholar terms the manipulative translations 'refractions' and, subsequently, 'rewritings'.

Refraction[3], as André Lefevere uses the term, is an expression of the distorted projection a translation would be of an original text, given the multiple constraints it has to submit to. Since 1985, the more complex concept of *rewriting* came to replace *refraction* in André Lefevere's theory. The new perspective focuses on understanding a translated text as a newly forged image of the original. A patron's demands, a given literary doctrine, a particular social, political and economic context, certain (translation, literary, editing, critics') standards are philters that truncate translated texts, that allow the passage only to certain (comfortable enough) elements out of many more and only in a particular way. Thus a translation project becomes a target-

[3] The term was used for the first time by Lefevere in his essay 'Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory' (1981) and was defined as regarding 'texts that have been processed for a certain audience, or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology' (cited in Dimitriu 2006: 67, passim).

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oriented operation, very much in keeping with the main claims of functionalist approaches to translation – purposes are pursued, source texts are used for their contents, contents are manipulated in order to trigger certain reactions / types of behaviour from the reader, images (of authors, cultures, literary works) are built (literary fame histories being distorted or entirely re-written), cultures are re-constructed. So translators are not only ideological tools of (re-)creation, acting under social or literary constraints, they are also creators. Besides translations, Lefevere also labels as rewritings anthologies, literary histories, reference works, biographies and book reviews, as well as films, etc. as 'visual rewritings'.

The factors constraining translation are largely focused upon within the framework of the manipulation theory. André Lefevere refers to four sources of constraints, that are intra-systemic and extra-systemic[4]: *poetics* and *professionals* (intra-systemic factors), on the one hand and *patronage* and *ideology* (extra-systemic factors), on the other (Lefevere 1992: 12). Patronage is defined as 'the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature.' (Lefevere 1992: 15) and bears three major aspects: the *ideological* aspect, the *economic* aspect and the *status* aspect. Lefevere defines ideology (the translator's ideology, on the one hand and the patron's ideology, on the other) as a pressure that a translation is submitted to from the outside, but also from the inside.

As far as the Romanian communist cultural space is concerned, what Lefevere describes as the intra-systemic sources of constraints operating in the target culture enhanced the quality and quantity of translations (Lefevere 1992: 14). Various critical studies on translations undertaken during the communist years in Romania show that the poetics of the time required well-written translated texts, in terms of literariness, whereas professionals, i.e. both translators and critics closely monitored the quality of the translational output.

In terms of the extra-systemic constraints in communist Romania, i.e. the forms of patronage and the mainstream ideology, the State, as the unique patron in communist Romania, was directly involved in the translational campaign peculiar to this period. This was a form of undifferentiated patronage, to use André Lefevere's concept (Lefevere 1992: 17). The Party provided all the necessary financial resources for the propagation of culture, just as long as the latter did not offend the communist ideology. If anything in the content of the books should have been considered unacceptable from an ideological point of view, the book was to be 're-written', i.e. transformed into communist-non-offensive, even praising literary work. All cultural products were deviously manipulated with the support of an all too efficient tool – censorship, another highly important aspect of what the preliminary norms represented in the communist years, in terms of translation. Thus the patron's ideology had to be shared by all the agents involved in the publishing process: writers, translators, critics and publishers themselves. Most of the time, they did not wait for the censorship official bodies to censor (re-write) their writings, but

[4] For André Lefevere, a system is 'a set of interrelated elements that happen to share certain characteristics that set them apart from other elements perceived as not belonging to that system' (Lefevere 1992: 12).

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censored themselves, adjusting or even deleting / preventing themselves from writing anything that should have subsequently been considered inappropriate.

The State was directly involved in the Romanian literary life. The main censorship body was *Direcţia Generală a Presei şi Tipăriturilor* (The Directorate General for Press and Printing), the setting up of which must be related to the institutionalization of censorship in Romania, in 1949[5]. A considerable number of Romanian works were withdrawn from the book market and forbidden in libraries (even in private libraries, as was the case with the Romanian writer Eugen Lovinescu), being regarded as possible threats to the communist party (cf. Niţescu 1995: 146). According to Mihai Niţescu, who signs a detailed report on the Romanian communist censorship, one of the ways in which the State intervened in the literary heritage was by dogmatically ideologizing the re-interpretation of literary works and the literary history so that they should comply with the political standards (Niţescu 1995: 146).

Censorship, Marian Petcu reports, was undertaken before the literary act itself, through the 'shoulds' and the 'should-nots' that came from above, but also after the literary act, when texts were altered or forbidden altogether (Petcu 1999: 15).

Victorian novels held a special place in the translation plans set up by the state-owned publishing houses during the communist years. In other words, they were favourite candidates in translation selection and republication. The reasons were, on the one hand, the fact that Victorian literature had been part of the Romanian literary canon ever since the pre-communist period; on the other hand, the Victorian 'ideology' in these novels could well be manipulated via prefaces and critical studies in order to be in keeping with communist ideology. We will highlight this aspect in the following section, when we will discuss the translation of the Victorian literature during the communist period and, especially, the cases of the translations of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

3. The Victorian literature in Romania: translation standards and rewritings peculiar to *Vanity Fair* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

In his article 'Cartea engleză în România după 23 august 1944' ('The English book in Romania after the 23rd of August 1944') (1978), the Romanian writer and literary critic Horia-Florian Popescu took a survey of the translations from English literature that held an important place in the translation plans of the Romanian publishing houses until that date.

Popescu's investigation places William Makepeace Thackeray's *Bîlciul deşertăciunilor*, translation by Constanţa Tudor and Ion Frunzetti (four editions published between 1956 and 1972), in the series of the translated books with the greatest number of editions in communist Romania. He includes in the same series Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, translation by Paul B. Marian and D. Mazilu (five editions published between 1956 and 1972), Emily Brontë's *La răscruce de vînturi*,

[5] *Direcţia Generală a Presei şi Tipăriturilor* ('The Directorate General for Press and Printing') was set up through the Decree no. 214/1949, which was published in the Official Journal of the Socialist Republic of Romania, no. 23, May 1949.

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translation by Henriette-Yvonne Stahl (seven editions published between 1959 and 1978), Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, a translation by Ionel Jianu (two editions published between 1957 and 1959) and another translation by Ioan Comşa (three editions issued in 1965, 1969 and 1971) and Charles Dickens's *Marile speranţe*, translation by Vera Călin (five editions between 1947 and 1973). As far as Thomas Hardy's *Tess D'Urberville* is concerned, five editions of Eugenia Cîncea and Catinca Ralea's translation of the novel were published between 1960 and 1982.

However, prefaces and critical studies specific to these translations reflect the main communist textual and cultural grids, in the sense that the (editions of) translations that were published starting from the nineteen-fifties until the mid-sixties display re-interpretations (as rewritings) of these 'realistic' Victorian novels which could be easily manipulated so as to be in keeping with the communist ideology. Still, from the mid-sixties onwards, a shift of focus became noticeable, in the sense that the same translations started being prefaced by studies tackling issues related to the aesthetics of the novels and / or to literary techniques. In the introductory study to the translation of *Vanity Fair* (*Bîlciul deşertăciunilor*, 1956) by Vera Călin, Thackeray's novel is regarded as a satire directed against snobs, as a realistic description of a 19th century rotten British society, a corrupt mechanism, in which the upper classes manipulate the working classes. For this purpose, quotations from Marx and Engels's *The English Middleclass* are provided, in which Thackeray's work is praised for its moral, political and high social importance. Cornelia Comorovski, for a change, writes a new preface to the 1972 version of Constanţa Tudor and Ion Frunzetti's translation, in which an important emphasis is placed on the techniques Thackeray uses in his realistic novels, in terms of narrative perspective, characters, characterization strategies, etc.

In Vera Călin's 1962 preface to Eugenia Cîncea and Catinca Ralea's translation of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist subliminal message becomes obvious, when one of Engels's letters to Marx is quoted, revealing the total antagonism between the two political systems:

> The English proletariat is ever more bourgeois, this nation, the most bourgeois of all, consequently tending to have a bourgeois aristocracy, a bourgeois proletariat and a bourgeois bourgeoisie… Which is explainable for a nation that exploits the whole world (cited in Vera Călin's preface, Hardy 1962: 5).

Paradoxically, the same preface is kept in the 1973 edition of the translation.

4. Conclusions

This investigation shows that translation-*qua*-rewriting was actually foreseen by translation norms in communist Romania. Besides providing an account of the function of censorship in Romania during the communist years, it also highlights the fact that similar types of remarks regarding Lenin, Marx and Engels's ideology are made by critics in the prefaces that were published for the first time until the mid-sixties. More than that, the quotations from such communist ideology-centered studies even repeat in different prefaces to a series of translations from great Victorian novelists, which supports the assumption that this was a preliminary norm for the early communist period in Romania. This tendency must be related also to

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the tradition of publishing 'realistic-critical' Romanian novels during the communist period (cf. Negrici 2006: 19), which were aimed at demolishing the aristocratic society (2006). Furthermore, the absence of a clear-cut delineation between the historically-marked periods also explains the publication of prefaces with ideological remarks also in the 1970s.

However, an important emphasis has been placed on the fact that during the communist years, a massive translation campaign was initiated in Romania, as a result of the introduction of the concept of 'mass-culture' and of educational reform schemes. A whole new generation of professional translators emerged, whereas translation standards were established by publishers, professional translators and literary critics. In other words, from the perspective of translation-*qua*-translation in communist Romania, State-owned publishing houses as the main patronage institutions rigorously monitored the quality as well as the quantity of the translational output, given that, from the perspective of translation directness, translators always used the English original texts for their translation of Victorian novels.

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Abstract

The communist period represented a turning point in the evolution of translation within the Romanian socio-cultural space. The book cult the communist Party had instilled in Romania throughout the second half of the 20th century, together with the education reform were intimately liaised with the need for enhancing the access of the Romanian public to world's literary masterpieces. Hence the emergence of a new generation of highly competent translators, who provided an impressive number of high quality translations. The setting up of specialized publishing houses and magazines dealing with translations testifies to an *institutionalization* of translation in Romania during the communist period. However, there also was a flipside of the Romanian communist translation boom, given that books, one of the main informational resources at the time, could have also contained elements that were ideologically unacceptable to the communist Party. Therefore, censorship became a most powerful political tool for a social and literary phenomenon which could have threatened the ideological communist system. Ideologically offensive books had to comply with the communist doctrine, otherwise they were banned altogether. This paper focuses on presenting the extent to which the Romanian communist translation campaign represented an ambitious plan aimed at responding to the need for a literary, social and cultural synchronization, as well as a highly fertile ground for ideological manipulative intrusions or *rewritings*, as André Lefevere put it. Prefaces to Romanian translations of novels such as William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that came out during the communist years will be referred to in order to illustrate our thesis.

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