TRANSLATING AND PROMOTING ROMANIAN LITERATURE IN THE INTERWAR AND WW2 PERIODS

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Abstract: *Starting from the assumption that translation is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of both its production and reception, and since, throughout history, there have been various policies of encouraging/ discouraging translation, this paper aims at presenting the translation policies operating in interwar Romania.*

Key-words: *translation policies and strategies, interwar and WW2 Romania, translating culture.*

1. Romanian-British Relations in Interwar and WW2 Romania

In order to understand the translation policies that operated in Interwar and WW2 Romania, attention should be given to the wider cultural and historic context, as well as to the ideological and social trends of the time.

One of the most important contributions in the field was brought by Nicolae Iorga, the famous Romanian historian, highly concerned with the promotion and reception of English language and culture in Romania. He pleaded for the importance of learning English in order to facilitate an authentic understanding of the English literature, and not out of a snobbish or facile modernist preference.

Like other scholars interested in British culture, Iorga also contributed to the spreading of Romanian civilization and literature in the British environment. The famous Romanian historian published in Iaşi, in 1917, a history of the British – Romanian relations (*Histoire des Relations Anglo-Roumaines*), a paper that was republished later on, in 1931, and this time in English (*A History of Anglo-Romanian Relations*). This second edition, printed in Bucharest, contains a foreword in which the British historian and friend of Nicolae Iorga, R.W. Seton-Watson, argues that the British people can no longer show ignorance towards the people near the Danube. Additionally, when the volume *Poems by Mihai Eminescu* (*Poezii* de Mihai Eminescu) came out in London in 1930, with a preface by George

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Bernard Show, Iorga signed an ample introduction aimed to familiarize the British readership with the Romanian poet.

Significant contributions to the reception of Romanian literature and culture abroad were also brought by Professor Dragoş Protopopescu, head of the English department at the University of Cernăuți since 1925, head of the English department at the University of Bucharest since 1939, and prolific translator into Romanian of Shakespeare, G.B. Shaw, E. O'Neill or J.M. Synge. Professor Protopopescu's efforts to promote the Romanian literature are visible in several of his studies, such as *Literatura românească la Londra* (*Romanian Literature in London*) and *Scriitori români în America şi India, ecourile traducerilor lui L. Byng* (*Romanian Writers in America and India, echoes of L. Byng's translations*) published in 1921, and in *Ideea Europeană* in 1922, as well as an ample study of comparative literature entitled *Aspecte de literatură comparată. Folclor englez şi folclor român* (*Aspects of comparative literature. English folklore and Romanian folklore*), also printed in 1922, in *Viața Românească*.

Another significant figure among the promoters of the Romanian literature and culture at the beginning of the 20th century is Marcu Beza. Beza was an essayist, a literary critic, a folklorist, a poet, a prose writer and a translator, as well as one of the first Romanian specialists in British culture and civilization (together with Dragoş Protopopescu and Iancu Botez). His role was outstanding in the propagation of Romanian cultural values across the Channel.

Marcu Beza, of Aromanian origin, was born at Salonika in 1882. He attended courses in letters and philosophy under Titu Maiorescu, and obtained a scholarship in London, where he promoted the Romanian culture and literature. He was a reader in Romanian at King's College in London; in 1920, he edited the first Romanian grammar in English and Ion Creangă's *Memories from My Childhood*, translated by Lucy Byng. He was the first Romanian in the PEN Club.

Between 1921 and 1929, he was the secretary of the Romanian Embassy in London. His studies of English literature materialized in two syntheses, *The English Romanticism* and *The Contemporary English Romanticism*. At the same time, he extended his investigations on Romanian history and civilization in Britain, publishing *English Travellers on Romanians (1580-1825)*.

It was during this period in particular that he made his most outstanding contributions to promoting the Romanian cultural values, as maybe no one else did after him. Besides the popularization speeches he delivered at King's College, and the efforts he made in supporting the translation and publishing of *Pădurea spânzuraților (Forest of the Hanged)* by his good friend Liviu Rebreanu, his work is testified by the books written about Romania, between 1920 and 1947. Among these, *Papers in the Romanian People and Literature*, written in 1920, *Origin of the Roumanians* (1941), *The Romanian Church* (1943), or *Heritage of Byzantium* (1947) are just a few.

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Continuing the work started by Iorga in 1917, Beza's witings mention the establishment of English-Romanian and Romanian-English associations, cases of British intellectuals interested in the situation in Romania at the time, pointing at the same time at the presence of Romanian books in private British libraries. A true ambassador of our culture in Great Britain, Beza also wrote a study in Romanian folklore, *Paganism in Romanian Folklore (Elemente păgâne în folclorul românesc)*, written directly in English in 1928 and published in London, and a bilingual edition of proverbs, *The Romanian Proverbs (Proverbe românesti)*, in 1921.

Foreigners writing about Romania made their own important contributions to the intensification of intellectual relations between Romania and Great Britain. Examples of this kind include R.W. Seton-Watson's *History of the Roumanians* (1934), Ilfor Evans's *That Blue Danube* (1936), Maude Parkinson's *Twenty Years in Roumania* (1919), or Ethel Greening Pantazzi's *Roumania in Light and Shadow* (1920), *Romanian Furrow*, written by D.J. Hall in 1933, *Roumanian Journey* (1938), by Sacheverell Sitwell, *Invitation to Romania*, written by Derek Patmore in 1939 (in which *Mioriţa* appears for the first time in English version), or R.G. Waldeck's *Athene Palace*, a precise radiography of 1940-1941 Romania.

2. Translations from Romanian in the Interwar and WW2 Periods

The presence of Romanian literature in England, through translation in the XXth century is stimulated by the efforts made by Marcu Beza. In 1921 Dragoş Protopopescu, mentions in *Ideea Europeană,* the publishing of *Roumanian Stories* (*Nuvele româneşti*), translated by Lucy Byng. The anthology comprises 15 Romanian stories by I. Brătescu-Voineşti, I.L. Cargiale, I. Creangă, M. Sadoveanu, I. Slavici, I. Popovici-Bănăţeanu, Marcu Beza, Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea, C. Negruzzi, based on a selection of literary values accepted by most critics in the country at that time. The author also mentions the positive British critical reactions that appeared in prestigious publications such as *The Times Literary Supplement, The New Statesman, The Manchester Guardian, Aberdeen Free Press, Birmingham Post, The Gentle Woman and Irish Life.* These positive reviews were followed by an increased interest in translating a Romanian novel.

It is again L. Byng who translated *Viaţa la ţară* by Duliu Zamfirescu in 1926, under the title *Sasha,* and later on, in 1930, Ion Creangă's *Amintiri din copilarie (Recollections from My Childhood),* with a preface signed by Marcu Beza (who also prefaced *Sasha)*. Also in 1930, Alice Wise translated *Pădurea spânzuraţilor (Forest of the Hanged)* by Liviu Rebreanu.

Among other works published in English in the same period, it is worth mentioning two volumes of Romanian stories published in London: *Children Stories from Romanian Legends and Fairy Tales (Povesti româneşti pentru copii)* translated from Romanian by M. Gaster, and an anthology of stories entitled *Ghitza*

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and Eight Other Romances of Gipsy Blood (Ghiță şi alte opt legende de neam țigan) published in London in 1921 by Conrad Bercovici. The volume *Roumanian Birds and Beasts Stories (Poveşti româneşti cu păsări şi animale)* translated by M. Gaster[2] in 1915 is another instance of the efforts of disseminating information on Romanian folklore and old literature in Great Britain, together with the 1920 volume signed by S. P. Patterson*, Roumanian Songs and Ballads (Cântece şi balade româneşti).*

Poetry also stirred the interest of Romanian or British translators, an interest which is manifest in the publishing of volumes such as Poems *of Mihai Eminescu (Poeme de Mihai Eminescu)*, translated from Romanian and rendered into original meters by Sylvia Pankhurst and I. Ştefanovici, with a preface by G. Bernard Shaw and an introduction by N. Iorga (London, 1930), and two other volumes published in Romania, *Poems (Poeme)* by Mihai Eminescu translated by D. Cuclin (1938) and *Poems by Mihai Eminescu* translated by Petre Grimm (Cartea Romaneasca, 1938).

The translations from the Romanian published until 1947, although not in a considerable number, represent an important starting point for the reception of Romanian literature in Great Britain, providing the British readership with insights into the work of some representative authors.

3. Translation policies and strategies – Recollections from childhood translated by Lucy Byng

One representative work for the translation policies that operated in interwar and WWII Romania is perhaps Ion Creangă's *Amintiri din copilărie*, translated in 1930 by Lucy Byng, and published in London by J.M. Dent & Sons LTD. The preface to L. Byng's translation is signed by Marcu Beza, renowned for the efforts he made in promoting the Romanian literature in Great Britain.

The preface to this first translation of *Aminitiri din copilărie* describes an author "deeply rooted in the soil, with a pronounced idiomatic style savouring of peasant vigour and shrewdness" (Beza: 1930) and reveals the difficulties such an endeavour may pose to the translator. Beza also attempts to familiarize the British reader with the author, mentioning the contribution that the Junimea society had in the development of the reputed writer, his background in the village of Humuleşti, as well as Creangă's connections with Maiorescu and Eminescu, who determined him to start writing *Recollections*.

Moreover, Beza praises the work of the translator who, says he, surmounting the difficulties, "does her work for nothing else but pure love of it" which makes

[2] Mention should also be made of the importance of M. Gaster in the promotion of Romanian literature in England; he was an honorary member of the Romanian Academy, a Reader at the University of Oxford, exiled in London since 1885, and Chief-Rabbi of the Jewish community in London.

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Creangă "become all the more interesting, as he brings forth to the general understanding a new and fresh side of literary expression"(Ibid.)

As has been shown, the collaboration between Marcu Beza and Lucy Byng did not begin or stop there. In a translator's note to a previous work dating back in 1921, *Roumanian Stories* translated from the original Romanian by L. Byng, the translator mentions the great support Beza represented for the accomplishment of her task:

I wish to take this opportunity of thanking M. Beza for his most valuable assistance. Without his intimate knowledge of the two languages and his kindly and expert criticism these translations would never have seen the light.[3]

This translation of Romanian stories is particularly relevant to the translation policies that guided the translation practices in Interwar Romania. The book is dedicated to Queen Marie, a passionate promoter of Romanian literature in England, who actually signs one of the prefaces. She touches upon how little known Romanian literature is known in Great Britain, and she emphasizes the prominence of poetry and short stories over the novel; she also brings about the poetic and picturesque and gentle expression "deeply characteristic of Roumanian popular life and thought", as features of real interest for a British audience, and for "all those who care about literature". She moves on, clearly stating her desire to make Romanian literature known to the British public:

"it is therefore a great pleasure to me to encourage this book which Mrs. Schomberg Byng is sending out into the world at a moment when I am so anxious that my country should be better known and understood in England (…) I therefore, with all my heart, wish this little volume Good Luck. Marie"[4].

The book contains a second preface by S. Mehedinți, Professor at the University of Bucharest and a member of the Romanian Academy. Mehedinți presents each author in the collection in a domesticating attempt to familiarize the readership with the great names of the Romanian literature of the time. Domesticating, since Professor Mehedinți introduces most authors by assimilating them to writers that correspond to the readers' literary experience and expectations. Consequently, Negruzzi is compared to Sir Walter Scott, Popovici-Bănățeanu and Brătescu-Voineşti are compared to Dickens; Sadoveanu, in Mehedinți's words, "the most fertile prose writer among the younger men, possesses as novelist and story teller a touch which makes him akin to Turghenev and Sienkiewicz"[5]. Creangă is present in Lucy Byng's collection with the story *Moş Nichifor, Coțcariul (Old Nichifor, the Impostor)*. For this particular writer Mehedinți no longer finds any correspondent, emphasizing his unique style

Creangă is a production exclusively Roumanian; a peasant who knew no foreign tongue, but whose mind was steeped in the fairy tales, proverbs and wit of

[3] Lucy Byng in the Translator's Note to Roumanian Stories, 1921.
[4] Queen Marie in the Preface to *Roumanian Stories*, 1921, pp. VII-VIII.
[5] Professor S. Mehedinți in the Preface to *Roumanian Stories*, 1921

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the people. He wrote with a humour and an originality of imagery which make his work almost impossible to translate into other languages. (1921: IX-X)[6]

These translations paved the way for the *Recollections'* coming out, in 1930. In 1931, in *Folklore* magazine, M. Gaster publishes a review of both the English and French translations of Creangă's work (the French edition came out in Paris, in 1931, translated by Stoian and Lebel).

Already familiarized with the Romanian folklore and old stories, Gaster appreciates the "powerful language", and the "crisp manner", filled with "popular expressions which make his *(Creangă's)* book a mine for the philologist and also for the student of folklore". (Gaster 1931:333).

He further points to the difficulties of such an endeavour, concluding that the task has been successfully fulfilled in both editions.

It is no easy task to translate adequately the stories told by Creangă, yet the feat has been tried and has been on the whole successful in the French edition, in which Mr. Stoian and Mr. Lebel collaborated, and in the English edition by Lucy Byng, *aided no doubt by Mr. Beza* (my emphasis). (Ibid.)

He also comments upon the fact that the French version is closer to the original, due to the similarity between Romanian and French, as Romance languages, highlighting again the difficulties:

Of course it was impossible to reproduce the real charm of the original, but as far as possible, both have been able to convey to the reader some of the beauty and some of the strength of the original. (…) *I must repeat that to translate Creangă is not an easy task* (my emphasis). (Ibid. 334)

It is visible both from the prefaces, forewords and notes mentioned above, and from the quickest look to the translation made by Lucy Byng, that the orientation is predominantly towards the target culture. The paratexts try to adapt to the readers' horizon of expectations, directing the text towards the values of the target audience. The translation, in its turn, is target culture oriented; this explains the absence of footnotes for the cultural terms used, the spelling used for the proper nouns (*Humuleshti, Neamtz, Mosh Fotea*), sometimes even the names substitution (*priest's Esmeralda* for *Smărăndița popii*), or the replacement of specific cultural terms with more general ones (*buhai* translated by *drums*, *pluguşorul* translated by *Christmas Carols*).

4. Conclusions

This paper attempted to provide a general overview of the translation policies that operated in Interwar and WW2 Romania.

There was, throughout this time, a constant effort from the Royal House and Queen Marie, for promoting the Romanian literature and culture in Great Britain.

[6] Ibid.

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Equally important was the presence of Marcu Beza in London, whose efforts in this direction are outstanding. The translators from Romanian (very few in fact), were practicing mostly domesticating strategies, orienting the texts towards the values of the target culture. This explains for instance, the lack of footnotes in Byng's translation, the replacement of some culture-specific terms with general terms, or the adapted spelling of some proper nouns (Neamtz, Humuleshti, Mosh, etc).

In the interwar period, the translations from Romanian are published mainly at foreign publishing houses, the short story being the preferred literary genre, and more particularly, short stories that emphasize the originality of the Romanian culture. The translation strategy most widely used is adaptation, in an attempt to "adjust" the source texts to the values of the target culture, so that reception could take place as easily as possible, facilitating reading for an audience belonging to a "major culture".

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*** "Marcu Beza – diplomatul şi cărturarul", in *Rost*, http://sfioaniacobhozevitul.wordpress.com/resurse/marcu-beza-rost/

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