THE TRANSLATION OF SOME DIFFICULT TERMINOLOGICAL CATEGORIES IN THE HOMERIC TEXTS (Homer, *Od*., V, 63-75)

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Abstract

Our notations start from the idea that the translation of the Homeric poems represents one of the toughest and most significant tests verifying the degree of maturity of literary modern language. The whole of the respective texts contains numerous semantic fields which are extremely difficult to render, in terms of the possibilities of coherent configuration, according to the criterion of a rigorous matching of the signified to the most appropriate lexical signifier. The internal difficulties of any language are largely increased by the attempt to equate terms from another language, even more so when the source language is Homeric Greek, an ideal idiom, attested exclusively in its poetic variant. We illustrated the truth of the matter elsewhere be analysing some names of plants and birds or names of weapons and household objects. In the following pages we are going to look at some names of water courses and deities.

Keywords:

Homeric text, translation, literary Romanian, hydronyms, theonyms.

1. The text analysis centres on the solutions proposed in the six Romanian versions of the Homeric poem the *Odyssey,* which we have highlighted in our previous studies. We refer to the integral or, in any case, consistent Romanian translations, from the I. Caragiani edition (1876) to the D. Sluşanschi edition (1997/2012). The analysis is based on the fragment in Homer's *Odyssey*, V, 63-75.

Such an undertaking is apt to illustrate, from a fresh perspective, the evolution of the techniques and options of translation, of the respective

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exegeses, and especially the evolution of the literary Romanian language during the almost 150 years of effort to "naturalise" a masterpiece of world literature in the national culture.

Such terminologies prove the stability of the target language vocabulary in the pre-modern and modern age, the inconsistency of the suitability of the term to its referent, common to any living language and especially in the case of literary texts, the translator's ability to play with nuances. From this point of view, the way leads from the selection of the term which renders the primary, undiscriminating sense to the fructification of the profound, particular significations. Between these two extremes are situated the simplifications of some translators and the hazardous creations of others.

Here is the text under analysis in its entirety:

ὕλη δὲ σπέος ἀμφὶ πεφύκει τηλεθόωσα,
κλήθρη τ᾽ αἴγειρός τε καὶ εὐώδης κυπάρισσος.
65 ἔνθα δέ τ᾽ ὄρνιθες τανυσίπτεροι εὐνάζοντο,
σκῶπές τ᾽ ἴρηκές τε τανύγλωσσοί τε κορῶναι
εἰνάλιαι, τῇσίν τε θαλάσσια ἔργα μέμηλεν.
ἡ δ᾽ αὐτοῦ τετάνυστο περὶ σπείους γλαφυροῖο
ἡμερὶς ἠβώωσα, τεθήλει δὲ σταφυλῇσι.
70 κρῆναι δ᾽ ἑξείης πίσυρες ῥέον ὕδατι λευκῷ,
πλησίαι ἀλλήλων τετραμμέναι ἄλλυδις ἄλλη.
ἀμφὶ δὲ λειμῶνες μαλακοὶ ἴου ἠδὲ σελίνου
θήλεον. ἔνθα κ᾽ ἔπειτα καὶ ἀθάνατός περ ἐπελθὼν
θηήσαιτο ἰδὼν καὶ τερφθείη φρεσὶν ἧσιν.
75 ἔνθα στὰς θηεῖτο διάκτορος ἀργεϊφόντης.

(Homer, *Od.*, V, 63-75)

1. From the not really obscure, but rather difficult passages in the text, we remark the ***image of the four watery courses*** flowing through the grove at the mouth of the cave. Beyond the key-term, *cișmele/fountains*, IC; *fîntîni/wells*, GM *vs izvoare/water springs* at all the other translators, which opposes the meanings "man-made" and "natural, spontaneous"[1], the

[1] The original term κρῆναι etymologically justifies both, as κρήνη means "izvor, fîntînă/spring, well", as well as the Latin *fons*. Only in modern languages did the two meanings become separate. GM even says "fîntîni zidite/walled fountains". The word chosen by the rhapsode signifies, however, "apa de izvor care curge liniștit/spring-water flowing smoothly", thus opposed to πηγή "izvor care țîșnește/spring gushing forth".

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description of the setting and of the water movement, elaborately framed within the Homeric hexameter and wrought during hundreds of years, provoked confusion in modern translations, not solely in those into Romanian.

We are speaking about an ornate and, at the same time, coherent Homeric couplet/dyptic (*Od*., V, 70-71), in which the adverbs, the adjectives, the affixing and morphemic elements of nouns and verbs enhance the modality meant to express the spectacular flowing of the four streamlets, thus completing the magnificent natural tableau by means of their delicacy, suggestiveness and simplicity. Despite the metric and prosodic constrictions, the Romanian verse translations are all brilliant in their own way, although the ultimate triumph in deciphering the intricate web of visual, auditory and dynamic effects and recasting them wholly, naturally and flowingly into Romanian words is achieved, again, by Dan Sluşanschi:

Unul aproape de altul curgeau, ca o horbotă albă,
Patru izvoare la rînd, şopotind spre alt fir fiecare.
(DS, *Od.*, V, 71-72)

(*And fountains four in a row were flowing with bright water hard by one another, turned one this way, one that.* - A. T. Murray, http://www.theoi.com/Text/HomerOdyssey5.html)

Now, from the outside, the verses appear simple and easy to refashion, insofar as the central idea to be rendered was the symmetry and diversity of the flow of the waters. But, looking back on the struggle of I. Caragiani with the twists of the Greek text and the Romanian language of the 19th century, we have a clear image of the differences:

...din patru cişmele la rînd aproape una de alta şi întoarse una într-o parte şi alta într-alta curge apă limpede. (IC, *Od.*, V, 82)

2. For the ***names of gods and heroes***, we should expand a little the framework of the analysis, going to the last verse of the tableau and the immediately following ones, a passage depicting the ceremonial meeting between the two divinities who discuss the next step to be taken by Odysseus. *Hermes* is called "Mercury" at EL (56-57), with the usual paraphrases – "zeul cu nuia de aur/the god with the golden wand" (56). All the other versions use the Romanian transliteration of the Greek name, though each with a particular rendering of the Homeric epithets in the text:

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IC combines the simple names with diverse cognomens: *Hermes* (83); *vestitorul Hermes/the herald Hermes, omorîtorul lui Argus/the slayer of Argus* (82); *Hermesul cu varga de aur/Hermes of the golden wand* (83)

GC alternates the simple name, *Hermes* (13,1; 13,5; 14,7) with the cognomen without the onomastic determiner, *zeule preabune, cu sceptru de aur/most kindly god with a gold sceptre* (15,1-2), obviously misunderstanding the significance of the latter symbol[2].

CP calls him by his proper Greek name, *Hermeios* (V, 27, 28, 53), preferring, however, metonymies, sometimes through direct loan, *Crainicul Argheifontes/the Herald Argheifontes* (V, 42), *ucigașul lui Argos the slayer of Argos* (V, 74); *purtător al nuielei de aur, Hermeios/ bearer of the golden wand, Hermeios*.

GM retains the simple Greek name – in this case, *Hermes* (V, 101, 115), alternatively with its name-cognomen group, *Hermes cel cu varga de aur/Hermes of the golden wand* (V, 116); or the cognomen only, *ucigătorul lui Argus/the slayer of Argus* (V, 125).

DS combines two cognomens in the same syntagm, *călăuzul mai tare ca Argos/the guide greater than Argos* (V, 43; 75; 94), when he doesn't use the simple name *Hermes* (V, 27, 28, 54, 85). The customary usage of the combination *Hermes cu varga de aur/Hermes of the golden wand* (V, 87) observes, as in other cases, the system in the text, as the formula is used by Calypso, in the welcoming words she addresses to him.

Dan Sluşanschi's translation is worth quoting in full, as it constitutes a model of creative adequateness to the source-text:

Unul aproape de altul curgeau, ca o horbotă albă,
Patru izvoare la rînd, șopotind spre alt fir fiecare.
Iar împrejur o poiană 'nierbată, cu dragi viorele
Și cu brînduşe – și-un nemuritor de-ar ajunge acolo,
Stare-ar să vadă, și iar, desfătîndu-se inima-i foarte!
Astfel stătea și privea Călăuzul mai tare ca Argos.
(DS, Od., V, 70-75)

3. Even more interesting is the ***designation of the nymph***, in this segment of the fifth book of the poem. Her status in the hierarchy and her charms make her hard to fit into a stable onomastic formula in the Romanian language. She is sometimes *nimfă/zînă/cosînzeană/a nymph/a fairy/a fair maid*, sometimes *zeiță a zînelor/the goddess of the nymphs* or

[2] The staff, possibly decorated, functioned as a mark of the emissaries, who could not be killed or ill-treated, irrespective of the message they carried, by virtue of an ancient custom. The fact that Hermes's wand was of made of gold, *chrysorapis*, increases its symbolic and divine significance.

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zeiță/goddess in the proper sense, sometimes *slăvită, cu păr frumos/the praised, fair-haired one*, etc. The one who repeats at least three times the standard Homeric formula, as in the case of Hermes, is I. Caragiani: *divina între zeițe Calypso/the divine amongst the goddesses, Calypso*. The multiplicity of names in the original text stimulates the translators' creativity, strongly marked by naturalisation:

GM: *floarea-între zeițe, Calypso/the flower amongst the goddesses, Calypso* (V, 105-106), simplified as *zeița/the goddess* in other instances, due to the shortness of the blank verse, in the 1928 edition.

CP: *zeița Kalypso/the goddess Kalypso* (V, 77); *zînă/fairy* (V, 96); *nimfă cu plete frumoase/nymph with beautiful tresses* (V, 56); *a zeițelor zînă Kalypso/the goddesses' fairy Kalypso* (V, 84); *Kalypso, zîna zînelor/ Kalypso, the fairy of fairies* (V, 115-115)

DS: *Cosînzeana, nimfa slăvită/the Fair Maid, the praised nymph* (V, 56-57); *Calypso, zeița-între zîne/ Calypso, the goddess among the fairies* (V, 75, 85); *zîna Calypso/the fairy Calypso* (V, 116)

EL: *frumoasa între frumoase Calypso/the fair of the fairest Calypso* (V, 53); *zîna/the fairy*; *zînă dragă/fairy dearest*; *Calypso* (V, 56, 57).

In this case we can single out G. Coșbuc, who manages not to name her directly in any way, referring twice to the nymph/*nimfă* (V, 13, 4; 16,1) or to a *she*/*ea*, *her*/*a ei*, etc.

As for the rest, *Odiseu/Odysseus* is *Ulise/Ulysses* at EL (V, 57) and GM (V, 109), *bărbatul cel mai nenorocit dintre barbate/the most wretched of men* (GM, V, 140-141 and IC, 83); *cel mai nenorocit dintre războinici/the most wretched of warriors* (EL, V, 57), *mărinimosul Odiseu/the magnanimous Odysseus* (IC, 82), etc.; in his turn, *Zeus* is *Joe*, at GM (V, 131, 138, 150) and *Dumnezeu/God*, at EL (V, 57).

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