# TRANSLATING LITERATURE– ALWAYS A NEW ADVENTURE (I)
# -GENERAL VIEW UPON TRANSLATING LITERATURE-

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*Abstract*

Translations have always enhanced the national culture of a certain people, offering an insight into the core of that nation's identity. The idea of cultural identity, preserved by way of translation has, actually, developed from idea to ideal, since the ultimate aim of a translation would be to open doors towards the specificity of a certain language, but careful not to spoil its identity, that what makes it singular, different, distinctive.

***Keywords: cultural identity, literary translation, linguistic evolution, language uniqueness***

It is commonly accepted that translations have always enriched the national culture of a people, offering an insight into the core of that nation's identity. The idea of cultural identity, preserved by means of translation has, actually, evolved from idea to ideal, since the ultimate aim of a translation would be to open doors towards the specificity of a certain language, but careful not to spoil its identity, that what makes it special, different, unique.

As already stated before, "translation has become a means of integration of a culture, under all its forms, language, literature, art, etc. in the world circuit of cultural values. This integration implies a certain ranging to the other cultures in the world wide network, a certain 'imitation', but in a careful way, of values that are pertinent enough to stand the test of aesthetics and time and not harm the national identity of a certain people."[2]

We agree to Roger T. Bell[3] who underlines that "today international communication depends dramatically on translation". In order to perform a better comprehension of the translation process, we ought to be thoroughly aware of the mechanism of communication within a language, corroborated with a re-cognition of the values re-activated by means of translation and of the factors that impact upon the phenomenon in discussion.

In order to evolve, to interconnect, to understand and to be understood, people need to relate to the Other, and this prerogative is performed by means of translation. Each culture expresses itself to the self of the Other and it communicates itself to the self of the Other in its native tongue, yet languages do not conform to the physical borders of a nation, thus becoming open systems of multidirectional vectors, where translations play the part of an intermediator, an enhancer „which means to truly live in the Other, in order to then be able to lead him towards yourself, as an invited guest.'[4] Ricoeur proposes

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[2] B.O. Han, *On Translation: communication, controversy, cultural globalisation*, "Petru Maior" Univ. of Tg. Mure Publishing House, 2011, pp 80-84
[3] Roger T. Bell, *Translation and translating. Theory and practice*, Longman Group UK Ltd.,1991, tr. by C. Gazi, *Teoria şi practica traducerii*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2002, p. 21.
[4] According to Paul Ricoeur, quoted in B.O., Han, *Op. cit.*, p. 44



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models of integration that he believes are able to face identity and alterity. One of the Ricoeur's models is precisely the one regarding the translation from one language to the other. "This model is considered to be perfectly adapted to the situation in Europe, which, from the linguistic point of view, shows not only a form of pluralism impossible to overpass but, in the same time desired to be preserved."[5]

With the aim of ensuring themselves a place in the literature of one people, writers choose to leave a part of their souls under an art form, be it a novel, poem or play. We ought to agree that in most of the cases, the true worth of certain writers would not have been rightfully acknowledged, had not been for the translations in different languages, which enabled them to reach to a larger public; hence, translations ensure the virtue and the bond, in the same time, to continue the process of coverage against the vicissitudes of time. In his article, Munteanu states "translations constitute the second facet of the patrimony of values within a culture."[6]

Beyond being a means of mass communication, translation is endowed with the virtue to *trans-form* the worlds of literature, of art and beautiful expression of the self. It has the chance of *trans-adapt* the world of a word-creator into the world of a word-'beneficiary'. This is, nevertheless, a tantalizing endeavour, as it captures the thrust of the inner soul of both the writer and the reader. From this particular perspective, translation of literature seems to be the highest form of expression of the gist of the Self.

On the same tone, Clifford raises awareness upon some of the capabilities that the literary translator must command: tone, style, flexibility, inventiveness, knowledge of the source language culture, the ability to glean meaning from ambiguity, an ear for sonority and humility. Why humility? Because even our best efforts will never succeed in capturing in all its grandeur the richness of the original."[7] This is due to the fact that every literary instance captures an insight of the self of the original writer as well as the self of the people he belongs to, the national identity.

Translation, as rightfully excessively debated upon, is an extensive, striving, time and energy consuming process, which entails loads of qualities on the part of the translator. In her essay[8], appeared in 'Secolul XX', Ana Cartianu argues "the activity of the translator is a labour which implies patience, scrupulosity and devotion as well as inspiration and imagination. Besides the cultural horizon and linguistic competence, it requires some sort of a dual personality on the part of the translator. On the one hand, he carefully sets down, in order to confer as accurate as possible the intention, structure and language of the original, without harming the linguistic strata, the nerve, clear nature and the rhythm of the original style; on the other hand, by discovering new lexical, structural and idiomatic equivalences, and by use of phantasy and poetic feeling, he becomes the creator in a different register, on a different scale, of the original symphony."

[5] Idem
[6] Romul Munteanu, *Cultura Nationala si Traducerile,* Romania Literara, 25/1980, p. 20
[7] Cliford E. Landers, *Literary Translation – A practical guide,* Multilingual Matters LTD, New Jersey City Univ., USA, 2001, p. 8
[8] Ana Cartianu, *Din unghiul traducătorului,* Secolul XX nr. 1,2,3/1980, pp. 213-215



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All of these gain a deeper understanding and softer hue when pertaining to the translation of literature, that profound well of expressive force that looms the uniqueness of a people. Thus, it is only when translating literature that the "translator experiences the aesthetic joys of working with great literature, of recreating in a new language a work that would otherwise remain beyond reach."[9]

The literary works that truthfully earn the title of value which is 'masterpiece' are the ones that require and are offered several series of translations, as they are the ones prevailing enough to withstand culture. Consequently, it is of a vital importance for every new generation of readers to take contact to and become aware of the most illustrative authors of their own culture and of cultures around them, from all times. This helps readers acquire and develop a healthy perspective over the whole cultural phenomenon.[10]

"More than in other branches of the translator's art such as legal/scientific, financial/commercial, or in interpretation (simultaneous or consecutive), literary translation entails an unending skein of choices. (…) The role of choice in literary translation cannot be overemphasised; (…) at every turn, the translator is faced with choices – of words, fidelity, emphasis, punctuation, register, sometimes even of spelling."[11] The translators of literature go through much elaborated intellectual and emotional processes when performing a translation, for the process of choosing the collocation that best embraces the auctorial intent is without a doubt a challenging and demanding one. The choices they are struggling with are owed to the fact that dealing with the soul and sense of the Self of the Other could never be a task to be considered lightly.

Antoine Berman[12] sees translation as „an attempt of the foreigner", an essential understanding which defines our relation to the Other, the Foreigner. The likely reaction of the foreigner might be resistance, refusal, ethnocentrism. Any culture, consequently any language, might consider itself to be self-sufficient and tends to enslave, attach other cultures and languages. The attaching translation is the effect of this ethnocentrist tendency, of the superiority complex towards the foreigner, the foreign language, the original text. Berman proposes a translation based not on a subordinate relation of the foreign language by the recipient language, but on an equality rapport, "a dialog between the foreign language and native tongue."[13]

The truth that lies behind all this debate is that translation is indeed a means in the complex process of absorption of information from another culture, of enrichment with aesthetic values belonging to different other literatures, of both-ways borrowings of linguistic resources from the language of the Other. The only problem would, thus, be to

[9] Clifford E. Landers, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5
[10] Apud *Translation – today and tomorrow –on the availability of a translation*, Galaţi University Press, Romania 2008, p. 106
[11] C.E. Landers, *Op. Cit.*, 9
[12] Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, State University of NY Publishing House, 1992, p.28
[13] Idem



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be able to achieve translation properly, so as not to deceive neither the giver, nor the receiver.

In his article, Peeter Torop starts from the premise that both translating as a process and translation as a product are culturally determined facts. Culture implies translational activities, because only by the inclusion of new texts it can be constantly improved and developed or have its specificity outlined. Translations proved to be very important in growing the sense of identity of the receiving culture, the culture of the Other.[14]

A thought-provoking idea would be to outline what appears to be the double-folded approach to the concept of identity; hence, translation-wise, the translator tackles with different facets of the same notion of self: the individual identity and the national identity enveloped in the wraps of literature.

According to Nicolae[15] "Identity is, beyond any doubt, an elusive concept. It is framed in terms of 'being' as well as of 'becoming', of sameness and distinctiveness. As readers, we approach them from the point of view of mutable and immutable patterns. The included sense of self (one's uniqueness) is considered in the multitude of selves that are revealed as a result of different circumstances. It is also the result of external influences that the individual reacts to, generating the others' response. This is a perpetual process of acting and reacting that characterises the rapport between the individual and the others." This can but add to the magic the translator needs to work when taking up this endeavour of translating literature, since literature envelops the uniqueness specific to a people, therefore, allegedly impossible to "double" by means of translation. Yet, the translator of literature finds a way to make ends meet, to stay faithful to all of his masters: the writer and the reader, without harming but protecting by sharing the identity of the Other. Thus, the multiple facets of the identity reach, by means of translation, their correspondent in a whole new frame, whole new language, whole new world to meet the expectation of whole new people.

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[14] Peeter Torop - *Translation as translating as culture*, Sign Systems Studies 30.2, 2002, p. 45

[15] Cristina Nicolae, *The Self and the act of writing*, "Studia Universitatis 'Petru Maior' Philologia", 23/2017, Tg. Mureș, p. 144



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