TRANSLATING LITERATURE– ALWAYS A NEW ADVENTURE (II)
CASE STUDY: TRANSLATING LUCIAN BLAGA'S
EU NU STRIVESC COROLA DE MINUNI A LUMII

Bianca HAN[1]

Abstract

It is widely considered that during a translation, the text undergoes a process of metamorphosis. When it comes to translating literature, especially poetry, and specifically such poems as Lucian Blaga's *Ars poetica,* the implications and the necessity of the translation receive even deeper connotations.

Keywords: translating ars poetica, metamorphosis, cultural and linguistic challenges upon translating

There have been many considerations upon the condition of translations and the involvement they convey to the process of establishing the cultural frame of nations. It was nothing but the idea of closeness, communication, proximity the one that triggered the minds of the translators when they began to undertake the trouble to render certain words from one language into a foreign one; they considered that their actions of "trans-porting words, ideas, ideals between two entities of different languages could enable them to reach a mutual spiritual territory, thus, dismissing the obvious linguistic obstacles, in order to achieve a better communication."[2]

In Nicolae[3], we read that "Mușina sees language as 'an imperfect instrument' that distorts not only communication but also the individual by its artificiality and arbitrariness." In the same place we are made aware of "the impotence of language, its limited capacity to render the nuances of the world (be it outward or inward)."[4]

All this does nothing but augment the already acknowledged struggle entailed by the translation between languages, culminating with the translation between cultures.

On the other hand, it is widely considered that during a translation, the text undergoes a process of metamorphosis. The source text goes through a set of complex procedures: interpretation, adaptation, alteration, reconstructing in order to be prepared for the receiver, i.e. reader. Specialists in the field have pondered upon the issue of what is gained and lost while these actions are being accomplished in order to acquire a new text, a new product, perceived as a new project, that of the translator's. "Just as any project, it implies a series of ‚actions': making, re-making, un-making, novelty, knowledge, devotion, adapting, creation, communication, to list but a few. All these serve the idea according to which

[1] Associate Professor PhD., UMFST Tg. Mureș, Romania

[2] *Translation - Today and tomorrow - on the availability of a translation,* in "Translation Studies: Retrospective And Prospective Views", Galați University Press, Romania 2008, pp. 104-109

[3] "Inner World and Language in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*" in vol. "Communication, Context, Interdisciplinarity" 2, 2012, p. 648

[4] idem

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decoding, understanding and recoding of the message are precious phases that do not admit any flaws. Thus we can only agree to Goethe's words according to which translation remains, regardless of what some people might say, one of the most important preoccupations among all the human activities."[5]

And when it comes to translating literature, especially poetry, and specifically such poems as Lucian Blaga's ars poetica, the implications and the necessity of the translation receive even deeper connotations. Either considered a representative of the Expressionist movement, the constructivist phase of the Romanian modernism or part of the family of "modern creators destined to have a many-sided commanding influence over the culture they belong to"[6], Lucian Blaga authors a deeply profound and thorough poetry, by means of lyrical structure and aesthetic value. Hence, any attempt to render a translation of any of his poems would imply a mere amount of risk on the part of the translator, as the ideas enveloped within his poetry are anything but easy to penetrate, which is, actually, the poet's openly declared auctorial intent, so clearly stated in ***Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii***.

Nevertheless, this endeavour is undeniably worthwhile, since, downsides and shortcomings assumed, the poem in question is by far one of the most representative and profound modern Ars Poetica of the Romanian literature, without any doubt. Written in 1919 as part of the volume *Poemele luminii (The Poems of the Light)* the poem stands as poetic manifest that cradles Blaga's lyrical belief and vision upon the world.

According to Boris Dralyuk[7] and Rodica Grigore[8] citing Andrei Codrescu, translating Lucian Blaga's poetry could never be an easy to achieve task, on the one hand since, in order to understand Blaga's poetic ideas, one would have to become acquainted to his entire work: "if in the case of other writers the contact with some of their representative works may be enough, Blaga's creation has to be read and studied in its entirety. The difficulties encountered by the reader of this lyrical work are the difficulties of any poetic world built from the inside"[9], thus, adding a huge extent of strain upon the shoulders of the translator. On the other hand, even understanding and fully acknowledging Blaga's poetic idea(l)s does not guarantee a thorough rendering by translation in a different language than the original it was initially written into.

Let us consider this as a disclaimer and analyse the two translation variants that follow. The first translation was completed by Oltea Simescu and Eric Williams while the second is the result of a translation workshop activity performed by students in Modern Applied

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[5] *Translation -a pass to knowledge and communication of aesthetic values*, in Education and academic research structures of the knowledge-based society, Univ. "Alma Mater" Sibiu, 2008, pp. 486-490

[6] E. Papu cited in Rodica Grigore, *Lucian Blaga Between Words and Silence*, in *Theory in Action*, vol 8, no 4, Transformative Studies Institute, 2015, p. 96

[7] B. Dralyuk, *Lucian Blaga in the Shadows: English Translations of the poet's work*, in „Philologica Jassyensia", Anul VIII, Nr. 2 (16), 2012, p. 205–209

[8] *A. Codrescu. Poetry and Exile*, provided by Diacronia.ro, "Petru Maior" Univ. of Tg. Mureș Publishing House, 2013, p. 39

[9] A. Codrescu, cited in Rodica Grigore, *Lucian Blaga Between Words and Silence*, in *Theory in Action*, vol 8, no 4, Transformative Studies Institute, 2015, p.102

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Languages of the ”Petru Maior” Univ. of Tg.Mureș, Romania, 2nd year of study, 2017-2018 academic year.

Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii
Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii
şi nu ucid
cu mintea tainele, ce le-ntâlnesc
în calea mea
în flori, în ochi, pe buze ori morminte.
Lumina altora
sugrumă vraja
nepătrunsului ascuns
în adâncimi de întuneric,
dar eu,
eu cu lumina mea
sporesc a lumii taină -
şi-ntocmai cum cu razele ei albe luna
nu micşorează, ci tremurătoare
măreşte şi mai tare taina nopţii,
aşa înbogăţesc şi eu întunecata zare
cu largi fiori de sfânt mister
şi tot ce-i neînţeles
se schimbă-n neînţelesuri şi mai mari
sub ochii mei-
căci eu iubesc
şi flori şi ochi şi buze şi morminte.

The aura of this earth must not be extinguished[10]

The aura of this earth must not be extinguished
Let me not trample through the mysteries
I meet on my path, stifle the secrets
Of flowers, eyes, lips and graves
With my reason.
Mysterious wonders, secrets
Hidden in the profound depth of darkness
Are extinguished by the glare of those who would reveal
With their reason.
As the gaze of the moon traces
The shadows of the enigma, enhances
The mystery of darkening horizons
Their cold secret depths are etched
With my light.
The enigma, the secret, the mystery
Grow under the scrutiny of my gaze
The flowers, the eyes, the lops, the graves
That I must meet and greet equally
With my love.

I do not crush the world's wreath of wonders[11]

I do not crush the world's wreath of wonders
of the world
nor do I kill
with thought the mysteries I meet
passing the path of my life
in flowers, eyes, lips and graves.
Other's light
Smothers the spell of the impenetrable hidden
In the deepness of dark
But I,
I, with my light, enhance the secret
Of the world.
And just how the moon's ghostly beams
Do not diminish, but instead
Keep spreading the night's wonders with a tremble,
That's how, I, too, enrich
The skyline's chaos
With gravely thrills of sacred mystery
And all that's doubtful
Turns into even deeper
Doubts
Before my eyes –
For I do love
The flowers, eyes, the lips and graves.

[10] *The poems of light,* by Lucian Blaga, tr.by Eric Williams and Oltea Simescu, Old Stile Press, 2002
[11] Translation exercise performed within the *Translation workshop*, with the input of AML (Applied Modern Languages) students of the ”Petru Maior” Univ. of Tg.Mureș, 2nd year of study, 2018: Balla E., Cioloca D., Kiss B., Mănescu D., Pintea G., Sărac N., Trîmbițaș A., Vințe M.)

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The first translation is represented by the translation performed by Oltea Simescu and Eric Williams, published in 2002 in a hand-crafted limited edition by Old Stile Press, under the title *The Poems of Light*, with expressionistic collage drawings by Sara Philpott. As it appears, these translations by Simescu and Williams appear bold and often depart from the original. In the case of the poem we are analysing, the title and introductory lines are rendered:

"The aura of this earth must not be extinguished:
Let me not trample through the mysteries
I meet on my path"

This may be fine poetry, but it seems to curtail the auctorial intent. "Blaga's original is an expressionistic manifesto of what the poet expressly does not do – it is the "I" who does not crush the world's corolla of wonder and does not kill mysteries. The plea "Let me not" is out of character for such a bold, albeit negating, declaration. (…) The volume is clearly an artistic achievement, but (…) its rather creative translations make it a less than ideal introduction to Blaga's work."[12]

In the same light, there is an eye-striking difference in manner in which the very title (also the opening line) of the poem is rendered by the two variants of translation: the Simescu and Williams' variant chooses to change the voice, from active into passive, thus, changing the subject in the original and adding more pathos and the sense of obligation by using the modal verb *must*. On the other hand, the AML students' variant of translation tries to remain faithful to the voice and the auctorial intent to stress the subject I. Besides, the choice for *aura of this earth*, obviously different from the *wreath of wonders of the world*, does not, necessarily, impose annotations, since both variants manage to serve the original right from the stylistic point of view.

Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii	The aura of this earth must not be extinguished	I do not crush the world's wreath of wonders of the world

The following lines continue to sense the attempt of the former variant of translation to re-create the poet's intent, thus, this is the first time in the poem the pronoun *I* appears, but in the Accusative case (Let *me*), not the Nominative (*I*), and also an inversion is met: *With my reason* set in the last part of this stanza, whereas the original starts with it: (*și nu ucid cu mintea*…). Again, the latter variant attempts to stay as faithful as possible to the original, preserving the register, voice and word order.

și nu ucid *cu mintea tainele, ce le-ntâlnesc* *în calea mea* *în flori, în ochi, pe buze ori morminte.*	Let me not trample through the mysteries I meet on my path, stifle the secrets Of flowers, eyes, lips and graves With my reason.	nor do I kill with thought the mysteries I meet passing the path of my life in flowers, eyes, lips and graves.

The lines that follow do trail the same manner of translation, in both variants, i.e., the Simescu and Williams' remain faithful to their already established style of re-composing, using inversions, more elaborated adjectives resulting in longer lines, whereas the AML

[12] B.Dralyuk, *op. cit,* p. 206

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students' one try to stick as closely as possible to the original, with increased attention to the choice of words in order to preserve stylistic images.

Among the most interesting samples we might focus upon when analysing the translation variants, there are the following: the former variant of translation keeps the verb *to extinguish* in order to render the original *a strivi* and *a sugruma*, while the latte translation goes for *to kill* and *to smother*.

Lumina altora *sugrumă vraja nepătrunsului ascuns* *în adâncimi de întuneric,*	Mysterious wonders, secrets Hidden in the profound depth of darkness Are extinguished by the glare of those who would reveal With their reason.	Other's light Smothers the spell of the impenetrable hidden In the deepness of dark

Another attention-grabbing instance is the following, as it displays yet another sample of free translation, mainly in the case of the former variant. Again, there is the much preferred inversion all through the poem, re-creation of the poet's intent in an otherwise stylistically legitimate manner.

și-ntocmai cum cu razele ei albe luna *nu micșorează, ci tremurătoare* *mărește și mai tare taina nopții,* *așa înbogățesc și eu întunecata zare*	As the gaze of the moon traces The shadows of the enigma, enhances The mystery of darkening horizons Their cold secret depths are etched With my light.	and just how the moon's ghostly beams Do not diminish, but instead Keep spreading the night's wonders with a tremble, That's how, I, too, enrich The skyline's chaos

In the sample that follows, the authors of the former translation variant seem to have lost their touch, since they chose to somehow wrap up the original idea in simpler lexical instances as compared to the highly elaborated original or the clean attempt of the latter translation analysed. Thus, *cu largi fiori de sfânt mister/și tot ce-i neînțeles*, rendered *With gravely thrills of sacred mystery/And all that's doubtful* in the AML students' variant, becomes *The enigma, the secret, the mystery*, maybe because the translators felt the need to re-establish the simplicity and serenity advocated by the poem itself.

Last, but not least, a thing ought to be established, as a disclaimer: this analysis does not endeavour to judge the quality of the two variants of translation taken into discussion, since translation of poetry is commonly agreed upon a highly challenging task, but a mere attempt to show how difficult translating poetry can become, how far different not further than two translations of the same original may turn, how elastic the aesthetic expressions may become in the hands of different translators.

Translation is, thus, alleged as a pledge between "all the forms of expression that support human activity, with focus upon the function of communication and self-communication of values, upon the importance played by the linguistic and cultural context in framing the phenomenon of translation, and last but not least, upon the theme of the overly-debated and forever modern problem regarding culture, perceived as the setting place of the operations aiming towards a desired and/or rejected cultural globalisation."[13]

[13] B. Han, *On Translation. Communication, Controversies, Cultural Globalisation*, Petru Maior" Univ. of Tg. Mureș Publishing House, Romania, 2011, pp. 45-46

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