ROMANIAN VIEWS ON TRANSLATION: THE YEARS BEFORE THE COMMUNIST ERA

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Abstract:Along the years, the process of translation has been perceived as being closely connected with the cultural and literary development of a country. The act of translation is an integral part of the cultural and intellectual environment of any country and it is only natural that the Romanian scholars should deal with the problems of translation as well. This article will offer a brief survey on the translation activity of some of our most important writers in an attempt to highlight their opinion regarding the act of translation, as well as their attitude towards translations from world literature. My analysis will cover the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s up to the Communist era.

Keywords: culture, translation, process, approach, literature;

The analysis of translations and their reception in Romania is a mandatory factor for an adequate understanding as well as appreciation of a larger phenomenon: the reception of a foreign literature in another language. In our country the translations from world literature have generated a constant interest, many of our most prominent writers taking a keen interest in the process of translation. Nevertheless they differ in their attitude towards translations from world literature.

Heliade Radulescu, in the preface to his grammar published in 1828, embraced translations considering that they were a means of inspiring and ennobling our language. He welcomed the use of neologisms to solve the problems of an immature language such as the Romanian one which was still in the making at that point. In 1839 his contemporary, Gh. Asachi writes:

Omul literat este acela, a cărui meserie el îndatorează a cultiva a sa minte spre a putea spori cunoştiinţa altora…Ambiţios de a înmulţi ideile sale, el caută prin veacurile antice, cercetează monumenturi şi scripte pentru a culege urmele uneori şterse, sufletul şi

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cugetarea oamenilor celor mari din toate veacuri şi ţari…El petrece culegerea literaturii străine, cu a cărei esentă înfrumuseţează literatura nationalã (Levit F. 1979: 144).

Although the word "translation" is not used directly, there is no doubt that Asachi referred to it: *culegerea literaturii străine – the gathering together of foreign literature*. He is one of those critics who embraced the idea of translations as a means of enriching our own literature. Moreover, Asachi strongly considered that Romanian literature could not evolve unless it was integrated within the process of world literature. He pleaded for a word for word and sense for sense translation, rejecting exaggerated innovations and staying closer to the spoken language. C Negruzzi also spoke about the importance of translations from world literature. As far as the process of translation is concerned, Negruzzi believed that a translator should render the exact content of ideas of the original text. V. Alecsandri, on the other hand, did not share the same view as far as the accuracy of the text is concerned. He would name those who gave a "word-for-word" translation "croitori de fraze absurde" emphasizing that one should give an unconditional importance to the language of the translation because when this language is hard to decipher or it doesn't appeal to the author, it "discredits" the original.

Alecu Russo belongs to the category of writers who condemned the translations from world literature. He declared himself not only against the copying of comedies or short stories but against any reckless reproductions which: *"ne strică mintea şi inima şi încet-încet va ruina şi patriotismul…şi care…nu încearcă creierul cu idei cu neputinţă de pus în legatură cu lucrurile vieţii zilnice."*(1989: 36-37). He criticized the language of the interpretations (tălmaciri) which neither the public nor the interpreter understands. The same position is shared by M. Kogalniceanu who – in the introduction to "Dacia Literara" 1840 – stated that *"traducţiile nu fac o literatură" – translations do not make literature*. According to the Romanian writer, the translations from world literature were welcomed as long as they did not influence the local creativity. His solution to this problem – as presented in the "Introduction" to *Dacia Literara*, 1, ian – febr. 1840, (pag.4) – was to find topics for writing among ourselves and try to refrain from borrowing from other languages.However, in spite of his negative feelings towards the phenomenon of translation, his attitude led to an increase in the number of translations, the effect being quite the opposite of what he had expected. Titu Maiorescu, another adversary of the "forms without root" (formelor fara fond) – whose denunciation he made in his article *În contra direcţiei de azi în cultura româna,* 1868 – brought his contribution to the

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development of an early stage of translation criticism. He criticized the excessive use of neologisms considering that such words should only be used when the Romanian language lacked the equivalent of the idea that needed to be translated. No neologism should be used just because it was a modern, more solid version of an older word. Maiorescu also spoke about the "false originality" – the redundant use of new words when there were old familiar words having the same meaning or the uncaused use of old words to substitute other meanings than the usual ones.

The theoretician and literary critic, Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea came with a more theoretical approach to the process of translation. Between 1894 and 1895 he wrote four articles on translations: *Inrîurirea traducerilor*, *Traducerile şi limba literară*, *Greutăţile traducerilor*, *Ce trebuie să traducem*. Through the help of these articles, Gherea voiced his attitude towards translations, their place within Romanian literature, the qualities of a good literary translation and translator. Unlike, Kogalniceanu, Gherea considered the translations from world literature as an integral part of Romanian literature. He noticed the small number of such translations in our county – scientific or artistic – which in his opinion was not beneficial for our intellectual development since they were considered to be of paramount importance for the progress of Romanian literature itself. The Romanian exegete also shed some light on the challenges faced by the translators in their attempt to offer an accurate translation. He declared himself against the current trend according to which in order to be a good translator one had to be familiar with both the language of the source text and that of the literature in which one translated. It takes more than that. A good translator should not offer a word for word translation but should render the atmosphere of the original, the cultural dimension, the wealth of ideas, images and feelings. He was afraid that, due to all these challenges, a translator would not be able to find the necessary equivalents in Romanian literary language – a language not mature enough at that point - and thus be forced to introduce new words or to give a larger sense to some of the existent words. Therefore, since to translate meant to create, a translator should be above all, an artist. These were the concluding remarks of the article on the challenges of translation and the last article would take this idea to a new level questioning what should be translated. The problems – Gherea considered – lay not only in the huge amount of literary texts from which one could translate, but also in the small number of Romanian translators. One also has to keep in mind that in those years, the translations were done mostly for commercial purposes and it should not come as a surprise the fact

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that Gherea advocated the idea according to which a translator should focus his/her attention on contemporary literary texts instead of old literary creation no matter how important they might be:

Aceste opere nu mai pot să deştepte mare interes în publicul cititor. Viaţa de care palpită operele clasicilor greci ori ale lui Dante, Milton etc. … e o viaţă moartă pentru noi; marile interese sociale pe care le ridică fiecare rînd din scrierile lor geniale sînt foarte puţin pricepute de noi, nu ne pasionează.(1980: 415)

Tudor Vianu in his work *Studii de literatură universală şi comparată* considered that a translation should be a work of art and should be done by trained writers. Their duty was to search and find national equivalents of the phrases, idioms or sayings of the original text. Therefore, a translator had to be an artist: he did not have to translate the words that made up a text or to render its stylistic particularities; he had to render the "spirit" that animated it. He also viewed the translation as a bridge meant to bring foreign writers closer to us and us closer to their world: *O traducere măiestrită ne deschide perspective noi către o lume necunoscută, face să răsune în sufletul nostru coarde care n-au mai vibrat. O traducere trebuie să fie o călătorie într-o ţară străină.* (1956: 275)

The beginning period of the 1900s was a very propitious time in as far as the translations from world literature were concerned. Unfortunately the market was overwhelmed by translations from minor, insignificant writings and this was due not only to commercial reasons but also to the lack of a solid critical apparatus able to select those values having a positive impact on the evolution of the artistic taste and on the critical reception. The literary historian Nicolae Iorga was yet another important Romanian scholar who advocated the importance of translations for the development of national literature. He believed that any young literature should turn its attention to an older, richer one which could provide the much needed examples worth following:

Amyot traducea pe Plutarc cînd Franţa se trezea abia la lumină; cu doua veacuri înaintea sa, biblioteca lui Carol al V-lea cuprindea un mare număr din operele clasice îmbrăcate în naiva şi nedibacea limbă a unui Nicole d'Oresme sau Raoul de Presles. La sfîrsitul secolului trecut, cînd Germania s-a regenerat la rîndul ei, oameni ca Voss au făcut cunoscute poporului lor cele mai însemnate din producţiile literare ale altor neamuri. (1968: 156).

In an article published in "Sămanatorul" magazine, Iorga mentioned that there was a demand among Romanian readers for a foreign literature, especially of French origin. He

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claimed that French literature was unable to offer the influence necessary to help us grow to be a truly civilized nation. He also condemned the quality of such translations. Only with the birth of "Junimea" did the Romanians get acquaintance with translations from German literature. Further on, Iorga condemned the absence of translations from English literature, the scarcity of translations from Polish, Russian or Italian literature. Editor in chief at "Sămănătorul", Iorga tried to build a national consciousness, a profound and healthy culture.

The years between the two world wars abounded in translations but we can also talk about a scarcity in as far as translations from world masterpieces were concerned. Constantin Gerea foresaw this a few years ago when he warned the translators not to translate from modern decadent writers and irrelevant writings.

As it can be seen, the process of translation is probably one of the most complex activities involving the manipulation of words. Translation is a craft, implying profound knowledge of different fields of activity: Linguistics, History, Literature, Culture Theory etc. Translation is also a creative act since to translate means to create. As far as the process of translation is concerned, there are translators who consider that their duty was to give a word for word translation (G. Asachi), others considered appropriate to render the exact content of ideas of the original text (C. Negruzzi, L. Levitchi), the atmosphere of the original text (C. Gherea) or the spirit that animates it (T. Vianu). Most Romanian scholars viewed the act of translation as one of the most important means of enriching our language, the borrowings having to be adapted to the Romanian language because – according to Ion Heliade Radulescu – through the help of translations our language would institutionalize words, phrases and idioms, would extend and stretch in all of the angles of the horizons of science, and being capable to voice any thought, would become the language of the future Romania (1980: XXVII-XXVIII). But the role of translations is not only to work as a bridge between different language systems, but also between different cultures, translations performing thus a crucial part in our understanding of the cultural "other".

With very few exceptions – Russo and Kogalniceanu for example – the Romanian scholars welcomed unreservedly the translation from world literature deeming it a cultural act, one that favored the knowledge and direct acquaintance with world literature. The translation from world literature enriches our own national culture allowing us to access

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valuable world literature, a literature that can prove to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

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