COLLABORATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL TRANSLATION: MARGENTO

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Abstract: Literary translation contains all the other species of translation: economic, juridical, technical and so on. This is possible due to the veracious appetite of literature. Literature is an omnivorous phenomenon: it feeds on every type of text. It means that the literary translator has to be proficient in all the other related branches of translation. In my paper I intend to highlight this interdisciplinary prowess of the literary translator by analysing Margento's book Nomadosophy: A Graph Poem (2013). This is not a common poetry book, as it is the result of a plethora of philologists and artists around the globe. Nomadosophy enhances the archaeology of meanings in subtext discussions, and then weaves them into the transnational fabric of the text.

Keywords: Archaeology of meaning, interdisciplinarity, Margento, negotiated and collaborative translation, expressivity

Literary translation is a multifarious business, one that encompasses both the skills of a professional translator, and the craft of literary minds. It encompasses the other species of translation: economic, juridical, technical (specialized/professional types) and cultural. That is why the ones who assume the responsibility of going into this "business" have to be masters of the target language but, in the same time, to benefit of the closest contact possible with the source language. These two preliminary conditions imply, first of all, that the genuine literary translator must be an aesthetic writer *and* a technical writer, if we take into account the complexity of literary texts. How is one to translate, for instance, literary works referring to industry, business or sport? Second, the literary translator must be a traveler if she is to have a living knowledge of the source language; especially in the case of English, as this *lingua franca* colonized in the past and is colonized now. There are plenty of versions, of cross-English around the world.

Third, a gifted and expert translator is able to read between the lines. As David Morley showed: "The writer weaves a certain degree of sparseness into their final text. If matters are left unexplained, untold, or the language of a poem is elliptically economical without becoming époque, then inquiring readers will lean towards that word (Morley 2007: 2).

And here we are, debating upon the most difficult – since subtle and suggestive- type of translation: poetry translation. In regard to the above- mentioned conditions, Chris Tănăsescu, the leader of band, meets all three of them: he is a published poet, an essayist, a world-travelling academic and an accomplished translator. Margento is an experimental syncretic band with a line-up consisting of a writer and a performer (Chris Tănăsescu), two musicians and (Costin Dumitrache and Valentin Baicu), a painter (Grigore Negrescu) and two vocalists (Maria Răducanu and Marina Gingiroff). The band made its debut 2001 and in 2008 they were awarded the Gold Record. They also took part in international Poetry Slam competitions and won many prizes.

The "graph" concept

In **Nomadosofia - Poem graf/Nomadosophy – A Graph Poem** (Max Blecher Press, 2012), collectively attributed to Margento as an enlarged team this time, Tănăsescu implemented parts of his international project of building a graph poem. This means that diverse poets launch lines of creation and others develop and multiply them. I have to remind that Chris Tănăsescu majored in Computer Science before graduating from Faculty

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of Foreign Languages, where he also earned an MA's degree and defended a doctoral thesis on rock poetry. So, his graph poetry is related to graphs in *discrete mathematics* and, on the same principle, relies on interconnectedness.

Margento's poetry pays great attention to form; somehow it resumes the haiku's inner contradiction (Altieri 1995: 72) between a strict structure and a dreamy, highly suggestive content. Because what matters here is the perfect blending of form and content: musicality and thought: This art is complex as it strives to capture both the local, the vernacular, and the international, so, the translation had to resort to different strategies: adaptation, foreignization, localization and so on.

One first obstacle is to feel and reproduce slang or ethnic pronunciations. For instance, "Uvertură: Țigan alfabet, cânt acordeon Roma" is slightly abbreviated in order to avoid hiatus and, especially, to render the uneducated, accelerated pronunciation: "Overture: the Gnorant Gypsy Play Accordion Rome" (Margento 2012: 9-10). The translation of the second section, "Bucharest – Budapest; More at Home than Anywhere Else", of the symphonic poem: **Europe. A Gypsy Epithalamium** belongs to Martin Woodside.

An idiomatic phrase like: "dumnezeu cu mila" is rendered as "may Lord never put me down", as there is no formal similitude. Of course, as we all know, good poetry is resistant to an exact transfer into another language. The same happens here: "cânt și io pă la metrău/să-mi cresc copilașu' meu" has to lose some phonetic aberrations. They are compensated with the help of ellipsis and idiomatic phrases: „here I play stuff in the subway/t' make some dough and feed my kiddies". The poet knows too well that „technical innovation for its own sake is like the tail that tries to wag the dog" (Barr 2006: 435). That is why he retains only those linguistic structures able to maintain the local flavour; through the skilful translation they become universal. Woodside dwelled upon the complexity of the text to be translated in a review of the book: „one readily senses the great fun Tănăsescu must have had putting this elaborate pastiche together, and the feeling is infectious. Pop music lyrics jostle with fragments from Charles Wright and Jerome Rothenberg. Conversations with Rothenberg work their way into lyrical mediations on etymology. Poems are translated from Vietnamese into English (and then into Romanian), while an e-mail exchange about the process of translating the poems runs across at the bottom of the page" (Woodside, unpaginated).

Translation procedures

Modulations are the charming side of this translation. For example, „terasele-s calde ca para" is rendered as "the outdoor pubs are as cool as flame" (Margento 2012: 10-11). Not all the rhymes can be preserved in the English version, as not all the words have an equivalent. A verse like „stăm tolăniți ca belferii-n cafeneaua" becomes "Later we lay cozy in…" (ibidem 12-13). So, Woodside tries as much as possible to stick to the original and keeps a keen eye on puns, allusions and idiomatic phrases.

Tănăsescu translated himself some of his poems. One representative poem is **Corul Țânțarilor/The Mosquito Chorus**. His expertise in translations allows him to preserve almost all the rhymes, but some sensitive and humoristic hints had to be compensated. „Da' mă gândesc cu dor la mama" gets reformulated as "But I still miss my good old mama", where „dor" is paraphrased. A highly idiomatic line: „s-o duc mânca-ți-aș la bodega muilie-n ruj de la las veghea" needs modulations and idiomatic compensations in English: "I gotta take her to the bodega named wanky bangy in lost vegas". The pun „las" -> "lost" functions only in the translated version. Almost untranslatable is a traditional Romanian poetry song refrain: „Trai neneacă, hop și hopa". „Neneacă" is an ironic-sentimental way of addressing a relative or a friend, and "hop și hopa" suggests a hopping dance. The translation could have straightly landed on hip-hop, but the traditional suggestion would have been lost. That is

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why he reformulates everything in an American country-like fashion: "one, two, dance, you dudes on dope!" (ibidem 26-27), a choice which also preserves the orality and euphony of the original.

Diaspora and cultural contaminations

At this point, I have to dwell upon Tănăsescu's diasporic condition. Wherever he has travelled, he immersed himself in the local culture by getting into contact with the local artists. This is the explanation for his capacity of and ability to localize and foreignize in translation. As Benzi Zhang remarked, the "term 'diaspora', as we use it today, indicates not only a condition of 'out-of-country' displacement, but also the mishmash 'out-of-culture', 'out-of-language' and 'out-of-oneself' experiences […]. Diaspora hence refers not only to a movement from one place to another, but also to the transition that implicates a paradoxical, multilayer rehoming process." (Zhang 2004: 105); of course, "evading" a culture means plunging into another/others. The diasporic individual gets even more culturally contaminated than those who stay home and do not take heed of local art and tradition. Maybe diaspora represents the utopia of translators: "Since diaspora develops crossroads that connect and span cultural and national borders, home occupies no singular cultural/national space, but is situated in a web of social, economic and cultural links encompassing both factual and fantastic conditions" (ibidem 106). Only in these conditions translators become intermediary agents and mediators.

Nomadosophy begins with two great gates: 1. **Europe. A Gypsy Epithalamium** and 2. **Asia. Planetary Rhythm Marriages**. The second gate contains some pastiches**. The EURO-GATE MARGENTO. Hungry Hell-Romania 1948** is a pastiche after Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" and it has a problematic line in terms of translation. "Au băgat un furtun, totuși, când m-au dat la câine" needs an explanatory paraphrase, which also, fortunately, enhances expressivity: "they washed me out of the cell with a hose and fed me to the hounds" (Margento 32-34).

Coming to the cycle **Uverturi/Overtures**, we are offered glimpses into the intricacies of translation. In working on Ly Doi's poem **Who do you take me for?** Chris Tănăsescu collaborated with Alec Schachner. The volume includes exchanges of e-mails between the two translators. One of the problem is the line "you are too shy of thinking": "Chris: Does that mean *too shy to think*? Or if not, how would you put it? Alec: I wouldn't translate 'shy'. 'Vo tu' has a number of meanings - literally 'absent of thought', but could be positive or negative. 'Carefree, unworried, headless, jaunty' OR 'disinterested' OR 'impartial, unbiased.' The pronoun 'bon may' indicates a strong negative attitude towards 'you', almost like 'you motherfuckers are so thoughtless', though not quite that vulgar". Then, there is a remark on the quality of the products of a Vietnamese translator: "Tien Van's translations are a little wacked out at times bc he's steeped in academic English but doesn't have a great sense of idiomatic language (he's told me this himself)" (Margento 57). The discussion in the subtext struggles to clarify some *unique items*, as Yves Gambier termed them:

translated texts would manifest lower frequencies of linguistic elements that lack linguistic counterparts in the source languages such as that these could also be used as translation equivalents. I will refer to these unique items or unique elements. The unique elements are not untranslatable, and they may be frequent, typical and entirely normal phenomena in the language; they are unique only in respect of their translation potential, as they are not similarly manifested in other languages (Gambier, Shlesinger and Stolze 2007: 4).

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These unique items are the dread, but also the pleasure of a fulfilled translator.

Recreating enjambments

In **[te mai adulmec oare...]/ [do I still get your scent…]** there are some interesting solutions. The Romanian fragment is: "De-așa obiceiuri de beci//mi se luase, dar ne-am con/format odată cu prost//ituatele tatuate/nederanjând și nevrând//să fie deranjate în afara/programului, la o iarbă.//Și dintr-odată (dup-o oră/pe care n-am simțit-o)//a-nceput să urle balamucul/o țăcăneală tehno" (Margento 98). The more synthetic „mi se luase" is rendered through the phrase "sick and tired", but the hurdle is the enjambment, as this highlights some sonorous effects, especially alliterations: „ne-am con/format odată cu pros//ituatele tatuate". So, „format" loses some of its rigid allusiveness, and the second enjambment suffers a compensation which increases its dynamism: „we com/plied together with the pros//tit-hoots and their tattoos". The last part of the fragment proposes some partial synonyms for „balamuc" and „trăncăneală", which even in Romanian are lateral or quite slangy terms: "a turmoil started with roars/and ticks of techno". Let's not forget that "tick" can mean also the tormenting insect, and this polysemantism strengthens the effect of the aggressive music. Some of these words are close to the conditions of *culturemes*, as they are defined by the same theorists: cultural phenomena "present in culture X but not present (in the same way) in culture y" (Gambier 5). Contemporary poetry implies "delicacy" in translation, owing to its openness to all linguistic registers: "Formal shifts of a more delicate kind occur when a translator shifts from one source-text verb class (say, transitive) to a different one in the target text (intransitive), or from a mass noun to a count noun, or from e.g. singular to plural" (ibidem 7).

Translating enjambments implies more often than not a change in the sense of split parts. An example in point is to be found in **Un arbore de ploaie în Pattaya/A Raintree in Pattaya***: „*o funcțională înrudire între meninge și mate/ria interstelară radiind//largi matematici" (Margento 154). In the source language, „mate" is a short form for "mathematics", but „ria" stays for no perceivable meaning, but it resonates consonantally with „interstelară radiind". In the target language the enjambed words are „mat" (which acquires a new meaning) and "ter", which is useful in the economy of the alliteration relying on "r". Apart from that, the translation resorts to transpositions and sense derivations: „/ria interstelară radiind//largi matematici" becomes "/ter radiating in the interstellar field//begetting mathematics". „Largi" means "large", so "begetting" involves a second generative process after the first radiation process. It results that Tănăsescu hardly ever prefers the *gist* translation or the *exegetic* translation. He tries to avoid synthesizing or explaining original formulations. He knows very well that it is "very hard to achieve an ideal *rephrasing, a* halfway point between gist and exegesis that would use terms radically different from those of the ST, but add nothing to, and omit nothing from, its message content" (Hervey, Higgings, Cragie and Gambarotta 2005: 10). Maybe also because it is self-translation, thus re-writing, re-creation? An application of what Marjorie Perloff termed "translational poetics", in **Unoriginal Genius**. Translating poetry requires both semantic and communicative solutions and a*cceptability* surpasses *adequacy*. **Nomadosophy** betrays a Balkanic flavour, irrespective of the profusion of snapshots taken worldwide. That is why the translators here made use especially of foreignization rather than of domestication. They understood that "an overt translation is realized as a way of providing the target world a glimpse into the source world, or of 'eavesdropping' on another culture or discourse community, and retains the integrity of the original socio-cultural context" (Angelelli and Jacobson 2009: 2).

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Musicality supersedes meaning

Many difficulties in translation presents the multi-layered text **Poemul de sticlă/ The Glass Poem.** From simple transpositions we are offered phonetic additions in order to increase musicality. The first stanza of **VIII. Fire e a fura**, with a gerundially compressed translation **VIII. Being is stealing**, looks like this in the source language: "Spunându-mi numele, lumea toată/ practic mă pupa-nprejur,/toți pe silabe-ar pune labele-/pe mine mă cheamă Mercur". The translated version implies dramatic modifications at the level of the third line: "They all call my name/that's how they kiss the whole of me/mouthing the syllable- siblings all the same-/so let me introduce myself, I'm Mercury" (Margento 194-195). The tactile sensation in the third line is pushed towards sonorous effects by adding "siblings" and by introducing "mouthing". The verse at the destination implies a sort of chewing, a sensuous pronunciation.

Another interesting modification is in the poem [**Intermezzo- și criminalii au nevoie de arta seducției, mai ales ei/[Intermezzo- the criminals also need the art of seduction; even more than everyone else**. Splitting the word *Jerusalem* generates different sub-meanings in the two languages: "sunt mulți români în ieri-Salem" and "there are many Romanians in Jerry-Salem". In Romanian "ieri" is a temporal adverb, while "Jerry", in English, is a name, even the shortened form of Jerome. Salem in both languages sends to the trial of demonized witches. Thus, there is a sliding process from temporality to onomastics.

Taking account of all these strategies we notice the *moderate* invisibility of the translator. Venuti saw invisibility as an attempt at *transparency:*

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities make it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text –the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'. The illusion of transparency is an effect of a fluent discourse, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, minting continuous syntax fixing a precise meaning" (Venuti 2005:1).

Targetting fluency reflects many times an inexpressive translation. It is exactly what Tănăsescu tries to avoid. He invests expressive content in the initial fabric of the source text.

Conclusion

In fact, **Nomadosophy** contains auto-translations and translations realized by a plethora of contributors. It is a *métissage* or an *interweaving* (Duarte, Rosa and Seruya 2006: 3) with the ambition of building up a homogeneous text. As many of the poems included in the book belong to Tănăsescu, he managed to instil here a protective approach, with no colonization or servitudes. In other words, there is no trace of gendered translation: "The hierarchical authority of the original over the reproduction is linked with imagery of masculine and feminine; the original is considered the strong generative male, the translation the weaker and derivative female" (Simon 2005: 1). The craft of translation in the case of **Nomadosophy** originates in a profusion of procedures: adaptation, re-contextualization, condensation, re-vision and so on. The great achievement is the overlap between local and universal from the point of view of a Romanian, which equates to an intermediary position between Asians and Americans. In this case, translation is also a balancing process with geo-political urgencies. Translations belonging to academics coming from neuter geographical stances are a future opening for the translation studies in the third millennium.

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