FRIGHTENED WOMEN IN ODYSSEY

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Abstract:Fear is frequently illustrated in Odyssey, both as male and female response to threatening acts or situations. A restrained search of the related passages in the first half of the poem highlights both the Homeric specific approach of the fear and the linguistic equivalence in the corpus of the major Romanian translations, especially the 1929 edition of Cezar Papacostea (Odyssey I-XII, original metre).

Keywords:Homer, Odyssey, translation, fear, female characters

The Homeric fear is strong, vigorous, even if not to be defined as strictly virile. More than that, the fear experienced by the male heroes themselves might be perceived as a sign of weakness, as symptoms of a feminine behaviour. We intend to exemplify here the frightened reactions of some female characters in exclusively a part of the Homeric corpus, *id est* the first half of the *Odyssey*. This selection is meant to draw attention to the major translations of this Homeric epic poem into Romanian, including an undeservedly forgotten version from the first third of the 20th century, belonging to Cezar Papacostea (1929, books I to XII).

The Romanian translations of the Homeric Odyssey are both numerous and dissimilar, not only as lexical options (which is to be expected when created by different scholars), but also as general approach: prose or verse, in iambic hendecasyllables, rhymed octaves, hexameters.

Remaining within the margins of the 20th century, there are no less than five outstanding translations, which hardly might be listed in a chronological order. The difficulty is due to the gap between the work of the translator and its editorial accomplishment that sometimes occurred only several decades after. As the translations become valid solely when circulated, in a large perspective (both cultural and editorial), the chronology of the Romanian *Odyssey*-s is the rigid chronology of their editions. The milestones of this enterprise are the *editiones principes* of the five versions: in 1924 is published the translation in iambic hendecasyllables of George Murnu (some fragments were previously published in 1906, in original metre), revised by its author in 1940; in 1935 is published the prose version of Eugen Lovinescu, initiated around 1917; the rhymed iambic octaves of George Coşbuc was published in 1966 (the poet was still working on it just before his death, in 1918); the series of the complete *Odyssey*-s ends with the *Odyssey* of Dan Sluşanschi, published in 1997 (reprinted in 2009, Publishing House "Paideia"), revised in 2012 (Publishing House "Humanitas"). Among these translations is to be noticed the half-*Odyssey* translated by Cezar Papacostea (1929), preceded by fragments published in periodicals, beginning with 1910, as the first extended attempt to use the hexametric dactyls. This *Odyssey* remained for about seventy years a singular endeavour to assume the dactylic rhythm for the Romanian version of the ordeals the king of Ithaca encountered when returning from Troy.

The translations were (besides several reprints) edited and reedited in philologically significant conditions. We add here some notes, in a non-chronological order, subjectively following their impact.

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1. Published some fifty years after the death of its author, the translation accomplished by George Coşbuc (in rhymed octaves, following the pattern ABABABCC), was edited by I. Sfetea and Ştefan Cazimir. The preface, written by Ştefan Cazimir, is followed by a "Note on the edition" that explains the editorial fate of this translation: it was in course of being printed by the Publishing House "Casa Şcoalelor" when Coşbuc died, leaving the final variant unaccomplished. The editors of the 1966 *Odyssey*, published by "Editura pentru literatură", attempted to offer a text as faithful as possible regarding the final desire of the Romanian poet (p. XXIII), working on the manuscript deposited at the Academy Library in 1941 (nr. 2924-2929). The editors compared this manuscript (corresponding to the 24 books of *Odyssey*) with: another manuscript, of the ninth book, deposited at the Academy Library in 1955 (nr. 3295); the typographical sheets of the Publishing House "Casa Şcoalelor" (the first eight books and the beginning of the ninth, stanzas 1 to 54), property of I. Sfetea; a galley proof of the tenth book displaying the corrections made by Coşbuc up to the 69th stanza (Academy Library, "Coşbuc" documents); a fragment (stanzas 70 to 85), with the Coşbuc's *manu propria* corrections. For the fragments that were missing in this translation, the two editors inserted, in final notes, the corresponding passages taken from the prose translation accomplished by Eugen Lovinescu; they do not stipulate the edition they used, but is certainly the 1955 one.
2. The Eugen Lovinescu's translation was published, in a first edition, in 1935, being followed in 1936 by a second and, a decade after, by a third edition (1946), posthumously published. The text was edited by Traian Costa in 1955 ("Editura Tineretului"), 1963 ("Editura pentru literatură") and 1966 ("Editura Tineretului"). These new editions (with notes, commentaries and *index nominum*) brought some novelties: a slight remodelling of the Romanian version and the corresponding Greek variants of the proper names that Lovinescu used in Latin form, in the current traditional manner, *e.g.* Iupiter (actually, in Lovinescu's option, Jupiter), Neptun, Minerva, for Zeus, Poseidon, Atena. The series of reediting Lovinescu's translation included the celebratory moment of reprinting the 1936 edition (Publishing Houses "Saeculum I.O" and "Vestala"), in 1995, with a postface by Traian Diaconescu.
3. The *Odiseea* of George Murnu clearly dominated for a long time the corpus of Romanian *Odyssey*-s, as part of the first complete translation of the Homeric poems. Giving up the dactylic hexameter he used in *Iliad* and in the first attempts to translate *Odyssey*, previous to the year 1906, George Murnu adopted the iambic hendecasyllables (in catalectic variant). In the 1956 edition (Publishing House "Editura de stat pentru literatură şi artă"), Dionisie M. Pippidi, the author of the introductory study and of the commentaries, expressed his astonishment for the fortune of this text: „vreme de treizeci de ani traducerea Murnu n-a cunoscut un răsunet pe măsura *Iliadei* traduse de acelaşi cărturar, în ciuda indiscutabilelor ei calităţi şi în ciuda împrejurării că – pînă în acest moment (*id est*, 1956) e unica versiune românească în versuri completă. Faptul de a fi adoptat endecasilabul, renunţînd la hexametru, nu constituie desigur o explicaţie, dat fiind că tocmai preferinţa acordată unui vers familiar cititorului modern a fost salutată de mulţi ca un exemplu vrednic de urmat şi ca o realizare marcînd izbînda literară cea mai valabilă a traducătorului" (note 1, p. 26). The 1956 edition was followed by the "definitive edition" (Publishing House "Univers", 1971), published by D.M. Pippidi, who included the changes George Murnu made during his last years of life. By the end of the '70, the Publishing House "Univers" offered a new edition, with an introductory study and notes by Adrian Pîrvulescu.
4. The final years of the 20th century brought a new Romanian variant of both the Homeric poems, accomplished by Dan Sluşanschi. The major change comes precisely from the *Odyssey* translation, which the translator decided to transpose in original metre, keeping a strict equivalence line to line with the Greek poem. Unlike the Murnu enterprise, this editorial

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project begins with *Odyssey* (1997), followed without delay by *Iliad* (1998). Both volumes were published by the Publishing House "Paideia", and were posthumously reprinted in 2009. The gigantic project of professor Sluşanschi meant to embrace, *in spe*, the two volumes within a series of the three major ancient (Greek and Latin) poems in bilingual editions. In 2000 were published the volumes *Eneida* and *Aeneis*: the translation of Vergil's poem (in dactylic hexameter, again in equivalence line to line with the Greek text) and the critical edition of the Latin text. A similar critical edition was supposed to conclude the Homeric volumes, together with separate volumes of commentaries. This project remained – *sic dis placuit* – unaccomplished. The two existing Homeric volumes were reedited in 2012 (Publishing House "Humanitas"), with the necessary correction of previous typographical errors and the insertion of the missing passages, using the documents (mostly manuscripts *et similia*) hosted by the "Dan Sluşanschi section" of the New Europe College library; there were only four lines that needed a new translation, made by Francisca Băltăceanu: 4.132-133, 6.200, 19.59.

5. Unlike all the others, the *Odyssey* of Cezar Papacostea was only republished without changes in 1946; we edited it in 2013 ("Muzeul Literaturii Române" Publishing House). His *Odyssey* ends with the 12th book; we have to acknowledge nevertheless that this half-*Odyssey* is to be considered imperfect, unaccomplished, only in an etymological sense of the term (as being unfinished): it is actually perfect in each and every line and "rhapsody" of the twelve books this remarkable translation contains. The specific melody of this text belongs not only to the seemingly unfamiliar rhythms, but also to the natural transposition of the Homeric story into the world of the Romanian fairytales: the goddesses are fairies, the kings are "crai", the ethic dative appears to be not only facile solutions to the hexameter necessities, but totally justifiable, inviting the reader to enter a story that seemed familiar.

Coming back to the "fear" topic in Homeric *Odyssey* (and keeping strictly within the margins of the first twelve books, in the Romanian translation of Cezar Papacostea), we might attempt an assessment of both male and female symptoms of fear.

Odysseus faces numerous frightful moments, nearly as many as his intense and abundant adventures. Some of them are natural, justifiable; some others are with no solid basis, generated solely by the mistrust he used to encounter even the most benevolent gestures. Belongs to this last compartment the way he responds when Calypso set him free and promised him even consistent help for leaving the OgygiaIsland. After seven years of being kept against his will, Odysseus had good reasons to suspect the proposal, which came all of sudden. The nymph, "zîna zînelor" ("the fairy of the fairies") in Papacostea's translation, was herself compelled to act against her will, in order to submit to the decision of the Olympian gods, brought to her island by their messenger, Hermes. Calypso tried to resist it while she answered Hermes, rapidly passing from indignation against the maliciousness of the gods, who were jealous of other's happiness (5.117), exemplifying some similar famous mythical episodes (5.118-119) that put her among some other goddesses who loved mortals (5.120,124-125), to a plea for her right to keep Odysseus for herself, as she – unaided – saved the endangered life of the shipwrecked sailor (5.128), highlighting the inconsistent plan of the Olympian gods, who want to release now a human that was meant to perish (5.129-130), and her devotion toward the unhappy prisoner. She finally resigns herself, given the implacable will of the god that all feared, Zeus (5.133-134) – and Calypso knows well this fear, which becomes the ultimate argument to compel her to renounce love. The nymph has one more slight attempt to keep Odysseus for herself, admitting that she is unable to send him home safely (5.139-140), and concludes with words of a woman in love, worried for the outcome of the adored (5.141-142). The mistrust Odysseus expresses in the next lines is even more prominent in contrast with her tender words, traversed by admiration for a man that is suspicious toward the benevolence of the gods. When Calypso unexpectedly is pronouncing

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the long-desired words "you are free to go" (5.159), Odysseus responds in a manner that might be reasonable only confronted with the changing moods of the gods who tormented him for long years: he is frightened (5.169). The two characters have a short but intense dialogue: Odysseus concisely states that he is being set up by the nymph (5.171), knowing the dangers hidden by the sea, huge threats even for those that are favoured by the gods, as well knows this hero chased and oppressed by Poseidon (5.173-174). He is ready to leave the island only for a fair fight with the sea, with no devious divine plans: he needs Calypso to swear the great oath, on Styx (5.175-177). This is the only guarantee he takes, the unique way to lose his fear.

This is an episode of a doubtful fear, justified by the long endured ordeal of the hero, but with no reason in the factual situation; all the other fears he encounters are less intense, being predictable, natural and simply human. The brutal fear he experienced in the cave of Polyphemus, or in close proximity to Scylla, or during the huge tempests on the sea, even the panic of Euriloch who, abruptly awaken, falls from the roof of Circe's house, the terror of the mortal that visits the realm of the dead – all these are totally human frights. The image of the sacrifice that god did not want to accept, on the Island of Apollo (12.395-396) – with the ox-hides that crawled about and the raw meat that bellowed – is probably the apogee of the terrifying episodes in his too long journey, mostly as being a warning for his companions that were never to see their island again: the dark omen is understood only by the hero, whose fear is multiplied by the feeling of being helpless.

The women are not supposed to face perils in some foreign and strange lands or sailing on dangerous waters. They remain at home, but are nevertheless exposed to fear. In a certain sense, their feelings are even more intense, being multiplied by the worries regarding not themselves, but the loved ones. Is highly emblematical the response of Penelope when she finds out about the deadly danger that menaced her son. Exhausted by edgily awaiting for her husband, surrounded by suitors, attempting to manage a household where nothing seemed to be normal any longer, she hardly noticed that her son was restless himself, given both the real facts and his own age, on the verge between adolescence and maturity, ready to assume the responsibility of a man, protecting his mother and, all at once, reproving her. Penelope seems to accept the change, but everything is still evolving, nothing is settled yet. Finding out from Medon that the suitors were about to trap and kill Telemach (4.689-691), she simultaneously discovers that his son has left the house, trying to get some news about his father. Penelope's response displays the whole range of feelings a wounded mother could experience: her heart is ripped („inima ei [...] în două-i se taie", 4.694), her knees are no longer sustaining her („genunchii în două-i se taie", 4.694), her voice is gone („Mută-a rămas îndelung" 4.695), she has tears in her eyes („ochii se umplu de lacrimi", 4.695), the sights hold back her words („Glasul îi e năbuşit de suspinuri", 4.696). She needs time to recover her strength – and does it indeed, like a perfectly rational person, asking precise questions, interrupted by laments, but carried on with great power: why did he leave? This is the source of her pain, but also the source of evaluating the situation, as the perils seem to be much higher than the hypothetical achievement („Spune-mi de ce a plecat şi fecioru-mi acuma?/ Ce trebuinţă era să se ducă pe luntrea cea iute,/ Luntrea... calul de apă cu care-omenirea străbate/ Nesfîrşitele umede drumuri în spatele mării?", 4.698-701). Her fear is justified and multiplied, as the long years of awaiting her husband are now deepening, having her both loved ones far away. Her pain is ripping („Sfîşietoare durere cuprinde pe Penelopeia", 4. 708) and her acts are matching her torment: she does not sit on a chair (4.709), but throws herself on the ground, actually exactly on the threshold of her wedding chamber („se trîntește pe pragul din uşa odăii de nuntă", v. 4.710), and her fall is accompanied by tears, echoed by her maids („Şi izbucneşte în plîns... iar în juru-i femeile toate/ Tinere şi mai bătrîne-ncepură să plîngă cu dînsa", 4.711-712). Her old nurse is comforting her, feeling guilty for not telling in due time the secret of Telemach

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(„Scumpa mea nimfă! Ucide-mă-ndată cu groaznica lance/ Ori mă mai lasă-n viaţă, dar nu pot să tac mai departe./ Toate ştiutu-le-am eu, şi din toate i-am dat pentru cale,/ Tot ce-mi ceruse: şi vinuri gustoase şi multe merinde./ El îns-atuncea m-a pus ca să-i jur jurămîntul cel mare/ Cum că tu nu vei afla înainte de dou'spre'ce zile,/ Făr'numai dacă-ntrebînd n-ai afla de la altul aceasta...", 4.735-741). The remedy of pain, in Homeric times, is somehow familiar to us: a relaxing bath and new cloths („du-te mai bine fă baie şi ia-ţi alte haine", 4.743), nevertheless a warm prayer („Roagă-te-Atenei, fecioarei fulgerătorului Zeus./ Numai aceasta e-n stare să-l scape din ghearele morţii", 4.745-746). The advice was good for Penelope, who regains strength and is able to return to the palace, renouncing the solitude that previously seemed the only remedy („Astfel zicea şi pe dată-şi uita de durere regina./ Merge de face o baie, şi-mbracă mai bune veşminte,/ Apoi se suie-n palat însoţită de slugile toate", 4.752-753).

The tears are not unusual for Odysseus himself: are actually abundant in the Phaeacian episode when, finding refuge from the sea perils and all his ordeals, is listening to the songs of Demodocus: the Homeric enlarged comparison is explicitly made in feminine context („Biruitor Odysseus, ajutîndu-l şi Pallas Atena./ Astea cînta renumitul aed... Odysseus se topise;/ Lacrimi şiroaie-i curgeau umezindu-i obrajii cei rumeni./ Cum îşi jeleşte femeia bărbatul ce-i este în floare/ Cînd el se luptă să-şi apere patria sa şi copiii;/ Cum ea s-aruncă pe dînsul de-l vede că-i gata să cadă/ Sub lovituri înaintea oraşului său şi armatei,/ Crîncenă luptă luptînd ca să-i scape de-o zi nemiloasă;/ Cum ea, văzînd că se zbuciumă-n ghearele morţii grozave,/ Cade pe el şi-l boceşte duios, iar duşmanul în spate/ Dă lovituri şi la ceafă şi-n umeri, şi-l duce-n robie,/ Chinul şi nenorocirea-aşteptîndu-i de-acuma în viaţă;/ Cum s-ofilesc apoi jalnic de plîns obrăjorii cei tineri,/ Astfel vărsa Odysseus din gene şiroaie de lacrimi." 8.526-538). The female character of this comparison is presumably meant to counterbalance the strength of Nausikaa who, alone among her maids, is fearless at the sight of the tormented shipwrecked sailor („Numai copila lui Alkinoos a stat îndrăzneaţă/ (Căci îi sădise în suflet curajul Atena ea însăşi,/ Şi-i izgoni din toată fiinţa sămînţa de teamă),/ Singură-îi stete în faţă...", 6.145-148).

Odysseus is weeping, the nymph Calypso only fears the supreme god that all feared, Nausikaa is fearless, Penelope is torn apart, but regains her balance with majestic dignity: the feminine face of fear in *Odyssey* is not fundamentally different from the male one. It is a simply human fear or, not unlikely, the fear understood by a poet, a male poet.

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[1] This is the corpus of the Romanian translations mentioned in the paper, presented chronologically (in respect of the year the first edition was published), in five compartments, corresponding to the five major translators of the 20th century editions. We preserved the original titles of each edition.

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