…AND, STILL, WHAT DO TRANSLATIONS DO?

Petre Gheorghe BÂRLEA,
"Ovidius" University of Constanța
gbarlea@yahoo.fr

Abstract

The old discussion about the purpose of translations in shaping a culture has been very often revisited in the last decades. This paper provides a number of examples, some very substantial, capable of illustrating the valences of translations. Even when they are not very successful, translations may change the mentalities of the receiving community, may entail the foundation of a great literature, may save a language from death or, in any case, may delay its natural disappearance, may sustain an ideology. The liberation from the 'pure language' of the original is a gain for both the source text and the target text.

Keywords

Translation, control and self-control of texts, the autochthonization principle, ideologisation of translation.

1. Motivation

The following considerations are an attempt to synthesise some observations and finds gathered in a lifetime by a modest translator and mainly a historian of other people's translations – from various languages into Romanian, in principle. Some of these notes have been carried in our professional baggage for more than a half a century. It is the case of the information about the translator Livius Andronicus, for example, with whom we became acquainted in the autumn of 1970, having been baffled by him being labelled as a 'founding writer' of one of the greatest literatures in the world. Our notes now make up a casuistry regarding what *translations do, how they do it* and *what they represent* in people's lives.

However, it so happened that, a few years ago (in 2014, to be more exact), a scholarly study, *Ce fac traducerile?* ('What do translations do?'), was published and extensively propagated online. Its author, Prof. Dr Alexandru Gafton, engages in an argument, across centuries naturally, with

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

Mihail Kogălniceanu, that *spiritus rector* of the century of great Romanian spiritual effervescence. Frightened by the mania for translations, adaptations from and imitations of foreign writings – many of them of modest quality even in the original – the founder of the providential yet ephemeral journal *Dacia literară* had given the verdict in the famous *Introducție*: *Traducțiile nu fac o literatură*[1] (which translates as 'Introduction: Translations do not make a literature').

In his usual philosophico-philological style, the author academically approaches the issue regarding 'what translations do'. Of the extensively valuable ideas relevant to the interdisciplinary and holistic approach of this topic, we shall further quote assertion no. 4:

„*Prin traducere, elemente, forme, structuri şi funcţii ale gîndirii, ideologiei, mentalităţii şi moravurilor generate de o anumită civilizaţie, cultură şi societate, pe calea limbii aceleia, pătrund în gîndirea, ideologia, mentalitatea şi moravurile unei alte civilizaţii, culturi şi societăţi, servite de o altă limbă. Un astfel de contact, o astfel de pătrundere, la nivelul a două complexe sociale, este mijlocit de instrumentul fundamental de comunicare, iar nu altfel. Lucrul acesta înseamnă şi că înseşi limbile – care, o dată, deţin formă, conţinut, structură şi funcţii ce deservesc calitatea lor de instrument, în al doilea rînd, există şi ca entităţi cu viaţă şi capacitate de autodeterminare proprii – intră în contacte proprii, una cu cealaltă*."[2] (meaning that 'Through translation, the elements, forms, structures and functions of thought, ideology, mentality and mores generated by a certain civilisation, culture and society,

[1] Mihai Kogălniceanu, „Introducție", in: *Dacia literară*, nr. 1, 1849, Iași: "*Dorul imitației s-a făcut la noi o manie primejdioasă, pentru că omoară în noi duhul național. Această manie este mai ales covârșitoare în literatură. Mai în toate zilele ies de sub teasc cărți în limba românească. Dar ce folos! Că sunt numai traducții din alte limbi și încă și acele de-ar fi bune.* ***Traducțiile însă nu fac o literatură.*** (emphasis added)." (The quotation translates as: 'With us, the crave for translations has turned into a dangerous mania, for it kills our national spirit. This mania is particularly overwhelming in literature. Books in Romanian come off the press almost every day. But what's the use? They are only translations from other languages and if only they were all good. **Translations nevertheless do not make a literature.**')

[2] Al. Gafton, „Ce fac traducerile?", 2014, cf. https://www.academia.edu/31886774/Ce_fac_traducerile. In this quotation, we have preserved the author's writing style, in that he uses *î* instead of *â* in all situations, with the exception of the word family of *român*.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

by way of that language, penetrate into the thought, ideology, mentality and mores of another civilisation, culture and society, served by a different language. Such a contact, such a penetration at the level of two social complexes is mediated by the fundamental communication tool and not otherwise. This means that languages – which, on the one hand, have a form, content, structure and functions inherent to them as tools, and, on the other hand, exist as entities with their own life and self-determination ability – come into their own contacts, one with the other').

Well understanding the context in which the 1848 Romanian ideologist made that statement, the distinguished modern philologist considers, nevertheless, that its understanding by contemporaries and successors as an 'operational truth' is 'shallow' and explains in a consistent essay which is the impact of translations on the evolution of humanity. Lately, this idea has been commented on by scholars from various perspectives[3]. Still, as usual, our eternally young confrere has moved faster and more inspired than others[4].

Nolens volens, our casuistry is confined to such statements. This is why we have paraphrased the title of the cited essay. Essentially, the supporting texts underlying our own observations are the translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, along with the commentaries of various exegetes, translators and editors of the so-called 'Homeric' creations or other types of texts.

1. What can translations do?

1.1. Translations release the texts from the captivity of the original language

The idea belongs to the German philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin and refers to the well-known truth that the translation is not a mere mechanical transference, but it confers new forms of life on the primary text, always invigorated by the infusion of supplementary sources given by each new integration into the language, mentalities and culture of the respective nation and by each new version in each language.

What is it about? There has been much debate about the principle launched – very successfully at the time – by Walter Benjamin, in the preface

[3] Cf., among others, Ionuț Vulpescu, 2014; Paul Cernat, 2016; Peter Sragher, 2018, p. 4; Eugen Munteanu, 2018; Tudorel Urian, 2020.

[4] However, not faster than Eugen Munteanu apparently, as the latter, in the 2018 article, refers to an older work of his on the same topic. Cf. E. Munteanu, 1986, p. 6.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

to the 1923 elegant bilingual French-German edition of Charles Baudelaire's *Prose Poems*[5]. The German philosopher, literary critic and translator discusses the 'principle of liberating *pure language*'. In the case of translations, the 'language' in an original text is liberated from imprisonment if the rendition is good. Such examples are the famous translations provided by St. Jerome for the *Vulgate* from the *hebraica veritas* (and not directly from the *Septuagint*, in fact, not only from this, as has been recently found) or Johann Heinrich Voss from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, by Hölderlin from Sophocles' tragedies (*Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*) and Pindar's *Hymns* etc. Later on, two ideas began to circulate nuancing W. Benjamin's theory. The first one is that those great translators, just like any others, released the pure language of the original only to bind it again, each in their own language. In other words, they changed one prison with another, from a different historical-geographical and spiritual-linguistic space. Then, a recent study written by Marc de Launay from the Université libre de Bruxelles[6] points out that the mere fact of resuming older ideas (from 1916) about the general theory of language in the preface to his translation and in the context of explaining his translation strategies erroneously placed W. Benjamin among the forefathers of traductology as an independent science, within the wide scope of the sciences of the word[7].

2.2. Translations operate a control procedure over the texts put into contact

In terms of *discourse analysis*, we may judge the role of translations by applying two principles formulated by Michel Foucault in his famous *The Order of Discourse*: that of 'commentary' and of 'rarefaction of the text'[8]. According to the philosopher from the Collège de France, there are texts

[5] Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux parisiens*. Deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers von Walter Benjamin, Heidelberg, Verlag von Richard Weißbach, «Die Drucke des Argonautenkreises», 5, 1923.

[6] Cf. Marc de Launay, "Benjamin à la tâche" , in: *Equivalences*, nr. 47/1-2/2020 (issue on the theme "Démythifier la traductologie" and celebrating its 50th anniversary – "50e anniversaire", coord. Christian Balliu & Françoise Wuilmart), pp. 107-126.

[7] Cf. the discussion about Muguraș Constantinescu, 2021, p. 23.

[8] Cf. Michel Foucault, 1998, pp. 23-26.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

which are *said* and texts which *say*. The former category includes the types of discourse that 'are recounted', in that they are *fundamental*, *eternal* and *immutable*. These are the Homeric poems, among many others in the spiritual heritage of humankind. They are endowed with the *ability to generate new texts*, springing into existence directly from the former, known as '*commentaries*'. Unlike a fundamental text, the commentary 'says' and is *temporary* and *changing*. Together, these two text types form a certain procedure of control and delimitation of human discourse, in general, namely an *internal procedure* through which discourse exercises its own control, operating a certain classification, order and distribution of the primary text, relatively independent of external interventions[9] (of civil society, of state, religious authorities etc.)[10].

Basically, Foucauldian 'commentary' means at least three series of new texts: a) exegeses on an original creation; b) translations; c) the original creations based on the exploitation of themes, motifs, characters or primordial literary techniques – Homeric ones in the examples we have selected[11].

[9] *Ibidem*.

[10] They may interfere, in their turn, not only in the original texts, but also in translations, cf., among many others, the situations revealed in P. Gh. Bârlea, 2021.

[11] Commentaries such as "exegesis" and/or "text edition" are those that range from the scholars of the Great Library of Alexandria (Zenodotus of Ephesus or Aristarchus of Samothrace) to Friederich August Wolf, and his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, 1795, (the exegete deserves to be mentioned because he used the term 'philology', imposing the concept as a discipline of study in the academic environment), and from here to the modern Giambatista Vico, Erich Auerbach, Geoffray Kirk and so on. As regards the translations, one should mention the Latin L. Andronicus and Publius Baebius Italicus, the English George Chapman (1598 - *Iliad* and 1616 – *Odyssey*), the German Johann Heinrich Voss, *Odyssey*, 1781 and *Iliad*, 1793, the French Leconte de Lisle (1866 – *Iliad*; 1868 – *Odyssey*), and the present-day Dan Slușanschi (1998-2012) or Daniel Mendelsohn (2020). For Homer-based original creations of all kinds – adaptations, reinterpretations etc. – see Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Posthomerica* by Quintus of Smyrna; *Le roman de Troie* of Benoît de Saint Maure, James Joyce' *Ulysses* or the more recent *În drum spre Ikaria* by Gabriel Chifu, or Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. Sometimes, the three types are to be found together in the same modern writing, such as the novel of D. Mendelsohn, *An Odyssey: A Father, a Son, and an Epic*, 2017, which also includes a personal creation and consistent exegetic fragments and translations belonging to the novelist, exegete translator and classicist professor authoring the book.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

In all cases, the secondary texts resulting from the 'commentary' upon the primary fundamental text show how rich its internal resources are, how many hidden messages are still to be discovered in it. In other words, the exegeses, translations and original creations produced in the extension of the primary text point out its polyvalent nature, its ability to always be re-actualised. This, however, brings about a paradox: an old text, declared fundamental, eternal, immutable, proves to be, in fact, eternally renewable, open. Michel Foucault goes even further with the subtlety of highlighting paradoxes, the role play between the fundamental text and the secondary one, which resumes it, being two-fold:

"[...] *the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said.*" (p. 25).

To put it another way, the role of translations into modern languages (as that of theoretical interpretations, original creations based on old ones etc.) is not restricted to rendering the essential of a masterpiece, but also extends to that of revealing hidden meanings, suggestions of great subtlety in the original text. Such achievements do not depend only on the competence-performance relationship in the personal structure of the individual approaching the text, but also on the compensatory virtues of the language in which that translation (and text analysis etc.) is written. We already know, even before Wilhelm von Humboldt's masterful demonstration, that there is an 'inner genius' of each language manifesting itself in two ways:

a) the linguistic community, marked by certain living conditions and mindset, imprints a structure specific to that language, particularly at lexico-semantic and stylistic level, but also at the morpho-syntactic and phonetic level;

b) the linguistic structure requires a certain way of 'cutting' the surrounding reality one sees, understands and expresses only in the manner in which the language used allows one to do it.[12]

Here, a second Foucauldian principle, complementary to the abovementioned, is appropriate: *the principle of rarefication* of the discourse, materialised in the "*issue of the author*"[13]. The successive revisitations on the

[12] Wilhelm von Humbodt, 2008, p. 345.
[13] M. Foucault, *op. cit*., pp. 26-28.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

fundamental text strengthen the authorship, even that of Homer, who we know is actually only a symbol of the anonymous *aoidoi* in the age of the genesis and dissemination of the two great epic poems. On the other hand, being always different, secondary texts – translations, in our case – do not greatly privilege the person of the translator, much less that of the exegete, although, unlike the legendary Homer, they have a definite identity and an intellectual status of great influence (such as George Chapman, Leconte de Lisle, Giambattista Vico, Goethe, Schiller, Erich Auerbach etc.).

All these processes illustrate the double nature of the phenomenon known in the universal history of translations:

a) the base-text is better and better preserved, despite it becoming older as time goes by, in fact, it regenerates continually, developing new ideatic and aesthetic details;

b) the base-text undergoes successive reinterpretations, through 'localisations' which make the message perceivable by the receivers in certain new geographic areas and historical epochs; these adaptations distort the 'atmosphere' of the original.

In all cases, we are referring to the role of internal control of translations over the evolution of thinking of human communities under discussion.

2.3. Translations may lay the foundations for a national literature

If we accept the fact that the founder of Latin literature[14] is Livius Andronicus, we must also acknowledge that this future great classic literature, which inspired the founders of many national modern literatures, owes its beginnings to translations from Greek.

Basically, L. Andronicus' masterpiece is the translation of the *Odyssey* into Saturnian Latin verses[15]. A freedman born in the Greek-speaking Tarentum, who later became a private then public pedagogue, he

[14] Appius Claudius Caecus (4th-3rd centuries BC) was only the precursor of Latin literature and the 'literary fragments' kept from him are, in fact, politico-juridical discourses, maxims and grammatical (actually phonetical and graphical) recommendations.

[15] The Saturnian verse was an Italic verse, rather little-known today for it was not used for a long time, and the text fragments preserved are poor and with variations of metrical formulas. Basically, it consisted of three iambs, a long syllable and three trochees.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

used that text as a teaching material for his lessons of language, history, mythology, morality and civic education. About 40 verses of the entire poem have been preserved. Afterwards, having become famous, he translated by adaptation several plays written by the great Greek tragedians – *Aiax Mastisgophorus* and *Equos Troianus* from the Trojan cycle; *Aegisthus* and *Hermiona* from the Atreidae cycle; *Danae*, *Ino*, *Andromeda*, *Tereus* from the legendary cycle of female personalities – and comedians (*Gladiolus*, *Ludius*, *Virgus*) – with satirical references to the military fanfaronade – which have become commonplace within the Latin literature. The few dozens of verses, kept especially in later grammatical treatises as a sample of the old language rather than literary values (see, however, the quotes from Cicero and Horatio), prove the use of iambs consisting of six or seven syllables. The translation technique is that of modalisation, which goes as far as what we now call 'adaptation' – therefore, not a translation proper.

Finally, due to his reputation of being a great 'writer', he was requested to compose a religious hymn in honour of the goddess Juno, at a turning point for Rome (the battle against Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother, in the second Punic war – 207 BC). The patriotic religious ode *Carmen Parthenion* (207 BC) is the most 'original' writing of Livius Andronicus, although it strikingly resembles the Greek poems (see, the hymns attributed to Homer, the hymns of Pindar, Sapho and so on).

Specialised treatises are quite reserved when it comes to Livius Andronicus' pencraft[16]. He did not excel as a translator either. A Grecophone torn away from his environment in his adolescence, before having the chance to complete his studies, he struggled with the study of Latin in the house of a Roman aristocrat (the family of Marcus Livius Salinator's descendants, of the ancient gens Livia), but living among the slaves. However, even the masters spoke that *sermo rustica*, for Latin was by its nature a "language of peasants and soldiers". Long after him, the Latin translators complained about *egestas linguae nostrae* ("the poverty of our language") just as modern language

[16] Cf. Rodica Ocheșanu, in: *Istoria literaturii latine.*, 1972[2], pp. 68-69: "*interes poetic scăzut*" ('low poetic interest'), "*lipsă de aptitudini poetice*" ('lack of poetic skills').

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

translators two thousand years later (Romanians or of other nations) were to complain, in the beginning, about the "narrowness" of their language.

Still, given the circumstances, the shortcomings and merits of translations are balanced. Livius Andronicus did not grasp the caesura in the catalectic dactylic hexameter in Homer's poem, hence, he did not understand the rest of the decorative epithets. Nor did the metrical foot chosen for Latin serve the heroic poem well (the iambic senarii and septenaries of the Latin Saturnian). Homeric metaphors did not appeal to him either – but the Homeric images have been much discussed in terms of translations. The Greek ἕκρος ὀδόντων 'the fence of teeth'("which let slip those reckless words"), cf. *Od*., I, 64, becomes in Latin (in which the Homeric poem is call *Odyssia*) the simple and prosaic *ex tuo ore* 'from your mouth'.

The same would happen in the case of the adaptations from the great Greek tragedies. Only those poetic images which were found in the expressive Latin spoken language of the time were reproduced, cf. *Aiax*:

Praestatur laus virtuti, sed multo ocius verno gelu tabescit. "Praise is bestowed on virtue but vanishes more quickly than frost in the Spring."

At sentence level, the opposite may happen – enunciative sentences may be rendered by exclamations or apostrophe-type statements[17]:

"*Grant me this support that I ask of you, that I beg of you*;
Reach out your hand, help me!"

These ways of transfer with pathetic effects, typical of the beginnings of a literature, incapable of rendering the simple gravity of the Homeric poem, are related to a Roman aesthetics of the age[18]. In fact, the complex sentence, with numerous subordinate, adverbial, object etc. clauses, is often reduced to mere juxtapositions, which alter the succession and integrity of the Greek Homeric *kolon*. And, we are told, that is not because Latin did not already have the object structures – infinitival or with the necessary connectors –, but because the Homeric narrative style was not understood in its letter and spirit[19].

[17] Cf. Sc. Mariotti, p. 51, *apud* P. Grimal, 1994, p. 61.
[18] *Ibidem*.
[19] Cf. A Traina, 1970, p. 21 *sqq*.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

On the other hand, L. Andronicus knew how to adapt everything to Roman traditions – which explains his success at the time. In tragedies, he dealt with Greek literary-mythological characters connected to the prehistory of Latins – Juno, Danae, Ino (that became the Italic *Mater Matuta*) – or to the popular figures of braggart soldiers, young spenders etc. In Latin literature, these dramatic texts became known as *fabullae*, which is justified precisely by the fact that only the story of certain characters is retained from the complexity of Greek plays. The Latins would praise such works for the models of heroism and virtue, on the one hand, and for the antimodels of social conduit, on the other hand, which they offered to young generations, and this view of art works remained fixed in their head throughout their history.

From here, the path to onomastic adaptations, and not only, was not too long. In verse I, 1, in which the divinity is invoked, L. Andronicus does not use the word *musa*, although it was already naturalised in Latin, but an old and respected Latin term, with a magical, incantatory charge – *Camena*. Therefore,

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ

becomes:

Virum mihi, *Camena*, *insece versutum*...

The names of the great Greek deities, which were very familiar to Romans, were not given as such either, but by equivalents: *Kronos* becomes *Saturnus*, *Hermes* becomes *Mercurius* and so on and so forth. And the eponymous hero, *Odysseos*, becomes *Ulixes* in L. Andronicus' Latin. We should keep this detail in mind!

Only when he does not find a convenient equivalent does he adopt the Greek names, but they are adapted phono-morphologically to the specific of Latin language: Gk. *Λητώ* becomes *Latona*, Gk. *Καλγπσω* becomes *Calypso* etc.

In conclusion, Livius Andronic did not leave us original creations, but he translated, adapted, paraphrased, imitated Greek creations. The linguistic and stylistic level is rather modest, given the objective conditions (the stage of development of Latin language and culture) and the subjective ones (his own competences). However, literary and cultural historians proclaim unequivocally:

„*Livius Andronicus a pus bazele literaturii latine, el a deschis drum nou în genurile epic*, *dramatic şi liric*. *Datorită lui influenţa greacă pătrunde*

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

larg la Roma."[20] (which translates as 'Livius Andronicus laid the foundations of Latin literature; he opened a new path in the epic, dramatic and lyrical genres. It is owing to him that the Greek influence became widespread in Rome').

Therefore, one may speak about two huge achievements due to translations (which were not even very professional):

a) they lay the foundation of a literature which would become, in its turn, a basis of universal literature for thousands of years of human spirituality;

b) they facilitated cultural interinfluences between two ethno-linguistic, political-economic and military communities that formed the basis of modern civilisation worldwide[21].

To these, we should add another achievement of detail, but not devoid of significances. After the success of the poem *Carmen Parthenion* (for the danger of Hasdrubal's entry in Rome had been avoided, cf. Livy, XXVII, 37, 7), the so-called Latin 'writers' (whatever their number or whatever their kind) were given the right to organise a professional confrerie, *Collegium Poetarum*. The Roman Senate even granted them their own headquarters, maintained with public money, where they could hold their meetings, on the Aventine Hill, in the Temple of Minerva (allegedly, for the religious services honouring the protective gods of museums). Today, we may say that Livius Andronicus' translations facilitated the establishment of the Latin Writers' Union, in 207 BC.

That is what translations can do!

2.4. Translations may save a language

There is evidence that a translation may prevent the aging and even the death of languages. The writer and essayist Ioan T. Morar recounts what he found out during a trip to the New Caledonia[22]. In the days of French

[20] R. Ocheşanu, "Livius Andronicus", in: *Istoria literaturii latine*..., 1972, p. 62.

[21] Naturally, any national literature began, in principle, with translations from other languages and imitations of earlier models, from other cultural-linguistic areas. Of the numerous opinions formulated in this regard, we shall quote the most recent one, belonging to a great Romanian literary historian and critic: „*In principle, literature does not come from anything other than literature; any writer - even a genius - in the phase of literary beginnings, follows a pattern which he/she does not hide, but proudly proclaims. Never did the activity of translation prove more creative than in the auroral stage of literatures*.", cf. M. Zamfir, 2021, p. 4.

[22] The discussion starts from the successive decisions of the recent popes of Rome to replace the Latin version of the *Mass* in Catholic churches with that in the modern national languages,

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

Christian missionaries, the Catholics spread the Word of God and strived to teach French and even Latin to the natives, whereas the Protestants tried to translate the Christian teachings into the locals' languages. This meant that they had to learn the native languages, partner with some sharp-witted indigens in order to carry out the difficult work of compiling glossaries, which later became dictionaries, elementary grammars etc. Naturally, the newly converted also learnt a little something from the missionaries' languages. I. T. Morar refers to the Borearé tribe, in which the *Huailou* language is still spoken[23]. Meanwhile, numerous other languages in the area have already disappeared or are facing imminent extinction[24]. A sad case is that of a language spoken only by three local survivors of a tribe[25].

Returning to the Huailou language, the process of translating the Bible was obviously extremely difficult not only because any linguistic transfer is difficult, but also because the locals did not have a normed language. However, the enormous differences in the *realia*, knowledge and mentality weighed the most. For example, how can one explain to the natives – co-authors of the translation, after all – an Old Testament comparison such as that of the camel going through the eye of a needle if there is no animal in

to reinstate it. The philosopher Michel Onfray, a confirmed atheist (who states, nonetheless, that: "Even if God is not part of my world, my world is that which made the God of Christians possible" and "Christianity has shaped a civilisation which is mine and which I believe I can love and protect without repenting, without waiting for forgiveness"), joined in the controversy with his article "The mass in Latin, a liturgical heritage", in: *Le Figaro*, *apud* Ioan T. Morar, "Traducerea care salvează", in: *România Literară*, nr. 36, 4 sept. 2021, p. 8.

[23] Incidentally, the author of the interesting article in RL is surprised that close tribes speak very different languages. No wonder, that is how it is everywhere. When Europeans came to present-day Brazil (1 May 1500), three hundred languages were spoken there – *different languages*, not dialects, idioms etc. In terms of differences and similarities, Romanian dialectologists (Nicolae Mocanu and D. Loșonți) have found on the spot that there are more common (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) elements in villages separated by the Danube (i.e., a village in Romania and the other one facing it, but in Bulgaria) than are in neighbouring villages located in Romania, therefore on the same bank of the Danube.

[24] They are recorded in the *Red Book of Endangered Languages*, part of the *Atlas of the World's Languages*. The existence of such isolated vernaculars, belonging to small communities, explains the extremely great number of languages recorded by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), which is in charge of valuable working tools such as UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, 2009, etc.

[25] Unfortunately, according to I. T. Morar, the three are engaged in a feud, do not speak to each other, so that language is as good as dead.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

New Caledonia except the Kagu bird (which, I. T. Morar says, has no natural enemies, therefore it does not even bother to fly and that is why it has lost this skill)? The author of the article assumes that the image of "Noah's Ark" must have seemed such a nonsense to the locals, as the various kinds of animals on board probably sounded strange to them. Further on, he wonders what they really understood about such ancient cities as Jerusalem, Rome and others, for they lived in forests, close to the paradisiacal state. What about the biblical fragments about the desert ("the flee into the wilderness")? They lived surrounded by luxuriant vegetation and waters. Or "why is gold precious"? Not to mention many others. They could not write, so the graphical signs must have initially been seen as magical symbols (which they are, we might say…), part of some kind of strange ritual. Somehow, the *Bible* was translated into the local idiom, the people became more cultivated, because the experience of translations generated forms of training and educations, managed to write down samples of oral literature produced by their own myths. The grandson of the first couple engaged in the work of translation (dictionaries, texts, basic grammar), Delim Wema, who spoke with I. T. Morar, came to study in Paris and taught a course on Melanesian civilisation there. In any case, in all the tribes in which this experience was repeated (and there were many because the Protestant missionaries were very diligent), the translation of the *Bible* stimulated an entire process of civilisation (schools, cultural life, local writings) and, if it did not to save, as we have said, those languages from certain death, at least it delayed it for long. Moreover, the corpus of written texts is extremely precious to the future generations of anthropologists, translators etc.

3. Translations facilitate the reception of the world from an autochthonous perspective

3.1. Latin versions – a model of translational autochthonization[26]

The Latin versions of the Homeric poems were the first examples of departure from the letter and spirit of the original text. And here we are not referring to the old, rough and naïve translation of Livius Andronicus, which is the first artistic creation in Latin (the end of the 3rd century BC), or to the

[26] In this chapter we have used an earlier text of ours, cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2015, pp. 23-37; *Idem*, 2016, pp. 26-31.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

translations from the classical age of Latinity. We are referring to the late achievements, from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when European national languages were still considered too immature to be able to render such masterpieces, although national epopees had already been created in those very languages. Only one adaptation, from the series of parallel texts, such as the 12th-century *Le roman de Troie* of Benoît de Saint-Maure's, could appear in archaic French. Otherwise, the Renaissance Humanism privileged the study of Latin Antiquity, so the French and Italian representatives of Humanism made *translations from Homer into Latin*. These are Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, Nicolò dello Valle, who provided timid versions in prose or verse, in the Latin language and meter. The Latin translations of Lorenzo Valla, *Iliada*, c. I-XVI, and Agnolo Poliziano, *Iliada*, c. II-V, were very well-known[27].

All of them used, according to the old tradition, the ancient Latin onomastics, i.e. theonyms, anthroponyms, toponyms etc., so that, to this day, *Odysseos* has been better known as *Ulysse*, from the Latin *Ulyxes*. In fact, the entire Greek Pantheon was adapted to Latin spirituality, which gave rise to a whole range of other "naturalisations" of the original text in our cultures.

3.2. The first translations into national languages and the method of 'naturalisation'

Once unleashed, this series of successive adaptations was hard to stop. Not even the resumption of scholarly studies directly on the Greek text, in the last stage of the Renaissance, favoured by the increasingly better Greek editions, could divert the trend based on the concept launched by the Latins – *translation* 'transfer, transformation, change to another form'.

Again, Italy and France proved to be a fertile ground for the Greek editions.[28] Unfortunately, the ever more scientific character of text editors did

[27] Cf. D. M. Pippidi, „Introducere" la *Iliada*. Romanian version by G. Murnu, Bucureşti: Editura Garamond S.A., pp. 33-34.

[28] The Italian scholar Demetrios Chalcocondyles, born in Greece, coordinated the publishing of the first edition of the Greek text in Florence, in 1448. Another remarkable work is the academic edition printed in Venice in 1571, by Aldo Manuzio. In France, valuable editions,

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

not encourage a proper view of translation. European national languages – Romanic, German etc. – were still undergoing a process of establishing a supradialectal literary version, and the idea that only popular genres – novel, short story, satirical poem – could be written in the *sermo vulgaris*, the national version, still prevailed in the literary creation of the age. The intellectual genres – epopee, epistle, philosophical lyric poetry etc. – continued to be written in Latin for a long time, just like scientific, juridical, diplomatic, theological etc. works.

Even after modern languages were finally considered capable of rendering the wealth of ideas and aesthetic values of the Homeric poems, the Latin model continued to prevail upon translational conceptions, through many of its distortions. The 17th and 18th centuries may be considered the age of the first important translations into the modern languages and cultures of Europe[29].

Therefore, translations essentially influenced how the base-text was received and entailed adaptations, autochthonizations and new interpretations in the target languages.

4. Translations may support ideological trends

As it is known[30], Amanda Gorman's poem *The Hill We Climb* triggered a huge discussion among specialists and, to a large extent, non-specialists, apparently on the issue of translation ethics. Why is this translation so important? The text deals with the racial and social conflicts in the American modern, allegedly democratic and civilised, society, which

which stand out through the accuracy of the text and the necessary philosophical apparatus, are those of Turnèbe, 1554, and Henri Estienne, 1566.

[29] In France, the translation of the *Iliad* began in 1545, due to the efforts of the poet Hugues Salel, and was completed by his apprentice Amadys Jamin, in 1580-1605. In England, the *Iliad* is published in 1598 and the *Odyssey*, in 1616, through the effort of George Chapman, one of the first great 'Homerists' of the modern age. In Germany, after the 17th-century versions of J. V. Rexius (in prose) and Johann Spreng (in verse) (1610), the 18th-century translations of Johann Heinrich Voss – *Odyssey*, 1781 and *Iliad*, 1793, made history, becoming landmark editions in the history of German[29] and European Homerology. In the meantime, many other editions – partial or integral, in verse or prose, in original or modern verse etc. – came out.

[30] Cf. Radu Uszkai, 2021, p. 13.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

basically would not get it out of anonymity. Nor would poetic art, dominated by the *spoken word* (the oral style) and *slam poetry* ('loud poetry'), particularise it very much in the present-day American and universal literary landscape. It became known for the fact that the author herself, a charming African-American young lady, recited it at the inauguration of the American President Joe Biden (20 January 2021). Immediately afterwards, various publishing houses worldwide wanted to translate and publish it along with other creations of the fortunate writer. Among these, Meulenhoff Publishing House in the Netherlands, which entrusted this task to the poet/poetess (for it is a nonbinary person) Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, known for their novel *The Discomfort of Evening*, winner of the 2020 "International Books Prize". We should mention that it was Dorman herself who selected the translator, and the publishing company considered it 'the dream choice'. However, following the intervention of some writers, translators and journalists, who proved to be supporters of the *cancel culture* (or *call-out culture*) trend, the contract was cancelled. The leader of protesters who prompted this decision was the Black Dutch journalist Janice Deul. In an article which went viral online, she claimed that this translation could only be made by "a spoken word artist, young, a woman and unapologetically Black". Very soon, the same thing happened again when it came to translating the poem into Spanish. Victor Obiols, a white man known for his excellent command of the two languages in question, was initially commissioned for the job[31]. After handing his version over to the "Univers" Publishing House in Barcelona, he was notified that his profile did not meet the requirements of the American publisher or of US literary agents[32].

None of those who learn about these details have ever known that there might be other criteria of real, well-intentioned selection of translators than the foreign language skills. We may add here the various criteria invoked

[31] He has translated William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde, among others.

[32] The French editors, who moved more slowly, had time to find an "adequate" female translator. We have used the quotes for two reasons: 1. Because this term is used by the new ideologists of translations and cultural ethics; 2. Because professional "adequacy" seems at least questionable to us. The choice of the French publisher was the Belgian-Congolese Marie-Pierra Kakoma, a singer whose stage name is Lous and the Yakuza.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

by the external ethics of translations (various moral aspects etc.), amid the rapid development of traductology as an independent science in the field of the sciences of the word, but they are part of the internal, virtually negligible mechanisms of book industry.

But the 'revolutionaries' of traditional anti-culture place the extraprofessional criteria – race, ethnic group, religion, gender, involvement in their general protest movements against anything – above anything else and the issues regarding the adequacy to style are reduced to the appetence of potential translators for the orality of poetic structure and literary productions which are approved of *live*, spontaneously and 'definitively' by reciting in front of a loud and heterogenous audience, ready to destroy the aura of sacredness, intimism and elitism of grave traditional poetry. In addition, the ideology of metaphysical essentialism cultivated by J. Deul et comp. seems to impose sociometric rigours as well: a white author can only by translated by a white person, for example. According to this argument, for a young author there should be a young translator (it is what J. Deul actually said), for a female writer there should be a female translator, for a Chinese – another Chinese, and for a wine-loving writer – a translator fond of the same type of wine. An enclavisation of translations is actually called for, as it has been noted[33]. There is no longer the idea of the translator's 'getting lost in the text', of his/her creative imagination[34] or that of 'ethical narrativism', discussed by the philosopher Richard Rorty, an idea which exploits the latencies of literature in order to understand other ways of life and implicitly draw cultures towards one another[35].

Fortunately, not all publishers did as the Dutch, Spanish and French ones. The German translation of the novel *The Discomfort of Evening* was made by three women with very different racial, ethnical and religious identities. Still, the huge wave of the ideology of destroying millenary

[33] R. Uszkai, *loc. cit.*
[34] Cf. Nuria Barrios, the Spanish translator of Amanda Gorman's poem, in an article published in *El País*.
[35] *Apud* R. Uszkai, *loc. cit.*

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

traditions, which allegedly favour white race supremacy, has found a fertile ground even in the theory and practice of translating.

Conclusions

Translations are a much more complex and much more fertile human activity than one might think. From changes of mentality in the linguistic community of the recipients of texts in contact to supporting new ideologies spread all over the world, from the enrichment of language to their rescue, from providing creation models to founding an entire literature – the role of translations multiplies and diversifies endlessly.

Bibliography

BAUDELAIRE, Charles, 1923, *Tableaux parisiens*. Deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers von Walter Benjamin, Heidelberg, Verlag von Richard Weißbach, «Die Drucke des Argonautenkreises », 5.

BÂRLEA, Petre Gheorghe, 2015, „Autohtonizarea textelor homerice în versiunile sud-est europene", in: L. Spăriosu & V. Popovici (coord.), *Communication, Culture, Creation: New Scientific Paradigms*, Novi Sad, Europa Press, pp. 23–37.

BÂRLEA, Petre Gheorghe, 2016, *Traduceri și traducători. Pagini din istoria culturii românești*. Ediție îngrijită de Sorin Guia, Iași, Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza".

BÂRLEA, Petre Gheorghe, 2021, „Din nou despre autohtonizarea poemelor homerice. Cu privire specială asupra versiunilor turcești", in: Oana Chelaru-Murăruș, Mihaela Constantinescu, Claudia Ene, Gabriela Stoica, Andra Vasilescu (ed.), *Studii de lingvistică. In honorem Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu și Mihaela Mancaș*, București: Editura Universității din București.

CERNAT, Paul, 2016, „Traducerile fac o literatură. Pentru o istorie a literaturii române prin traduceri", in: *Revista de Traduceri Literare*, nr. 5, februarie 2016.

CONSTANTINESCU, Muguraș, 2021, „False mituri despre traducere", în *România literară*, nr. 26, 18 iunie 2021, p. 23.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

DE LAUNAY, Marc, 2020, "Benjamin à la tâche", in: *Equivalences* ("Démythifier la traductologie – "50e anniversaire", coord. Christian Balliu & Françoise Wuilmart), nr. 47/1-2/2020, pp. 107-126.

DOSAR *Dilema veche* – „Fac traducerile o literatură?", cf. https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/dilemateca/articol/fac-traducerile-o-literatura-literatura-romana-tradusa-in-franceza-spaniola-engleza-si-germana

FOUCAULT, Michel, 1998, *Ordinea discursului. Un discurs despre discurs*. Traducere de Ciprian Tudor, București, Eurosong & Book.

GAFTON, Alexandru, 2014, „What do translations do?", in: *The Proceedings of the International Conference Globalization, Intercultural Dialogue and National Identity. Section: Language and Discourse*, 1, Iulian Boldea (eds.), Târgu-Mureș: Editura Arhipelag XXI Press, pp. 13-16. Cf. și *Ce fac traducerile ? https://www.academia.edu/31886774/ Ce_fac_traducerile.*

GRIMAL, Pierre, 1994[3], *La littérature latine*, Paris: Fayard.

HUMBODT, Wilhelm von, 2008, *Despre diversitatea structurală a limbilor şi influenţa ei asupra dezvoltării spirituale a umanităţii.* Versiune românească, introducere, notă … de Eugen Munteanu, Bucureşti: Humanitas.

KOGĂLNICEANU, Mihai, 1840/1972, *Dacia literară*. Ediție facsimilată, București: Editura Minerva.

MUNTEANU, Eugen, „Despre traducere și despre limbile de cultură", in: *Dialog*, XVIII, noiembrie 1986, p. 6.

MUNTEANU, Eugen, 2018, „Traducţiile fac o literatură. Câteva reflecţii despre traduceri, cultură şi educaţie", in: *Limba Română*, Chișinău, nr. 7-8, anul XXVIII, 2018, https://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=3619

SRAGHER, Peter, 2018, „Traducțiunile sunt o literatură. Un dialog între Dan C. Mihăilescu și Radu Paraschivescu" – 21 februarie 2018", in: *Revista de Traduceri Literare*, nr. 28, februarie, p. 4.

TRAINA, Alfonso, 1970, *Vortit barbare: Le traduzioni poetiche da Livio Andronico a Cicerone*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)

URIAN, Tudorel, 2020, „Traducțiile nu fac o literatură?”, in: *Viața Românească*, nr. 5, 2020, https://www.viataromaneasca.eu/revista/2020/05/traductiile-nu-fac-o-literatura/.

USZKAI, Radu, 2021 „Cine merită să o traducă pe Amanda Gorman?”, in: *Dilema veche*, nr. 906, 19-25 august 2021, p. 13.

VULPESCU, Ionuț, 2014, „Traducţiile, totuşi, nu fac o literatură”, in: *Cultura*, nr. 6, 5 iunie 2014, cf. https://revistacultura.ro/nou/traductiile-totusi-nu-fac-o-literatura/.

ZAMFIR, Mihai, 2021, „Traduceri și traduceri”, in: *România literară*, nr. 45, 29 octombrie 2021, p. 4.

***, 1972[2], *Istoria literaturii latine. De la origini până la destrămarea republicii*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, pp. 68-69.

BDD-A32976 © 2021 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:52:49 UTC)