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CAUGHT IN TRANSLATION: WILLIAM FAULKNER WORLDWIDE

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Abstract: In recent years, William Faulkner's reception has tremendously grown due to an increasing variety and number of translations of his writings into several languages around the world. My paper sets out to review not only the languages Faulkner was translated into but also some of the most important challenges faced by translators when translating from source into target language. I argue that context-bound and context-specific terms may not only pose correspondence problems but they can also defy translation.

Key words**:** translation, recognition, influence, context, correspondence

Translating Faulkner is a strenuous task that requires courage, patience and determination.
Harrington and Abadie, 1992: 191.

In her well-known book *In Search of the Latin American Faulkner*, Tanya Fayen aims to examine the role played by Faulkner in the transformation of both narrative patterns and norms of literary expression in Latin America (1995: 131). Fayen claims that based solely on translations, the American author was poorly understood, the critic placing the blame for this situation mainly on the translators: "*the translators tend to translate somewhat stiffly, in a prose that does not capture the music of the original*" (ibid: 133-134). Comparing Portuguese and Brazilian translations, Fayen notices that Portuguese translators followed "*Faulkner's norms in punctuation, grammar and usage*" (ibid: 133), while Brazilian translators used to simplify the translations to a certain extent by getting rid of "*some of Faulkner's excess and unorthodox modifications*" (134). They welcomed Faulkner's long and over-elaborated sentences but broke up his lengthy paragraphs. Analyzing the early period of Faulkner's translations (1930-1950), the critic states that it was marked by rigidity – either rigid imposition of local norms or rigid closeness to Faulkner's norms: "*He is not sacrosanct and his narrative innovations are rendered*

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capriciously. The translators give the impression of worrying Faulkner's practices in an effort to come to grips with them" (ibid: 134). The '50s are characterized by "transparent" translations. This is also the time when Latin American translation of Faulkner comes to an end, Fayen claiming that after this period the translations of Faulkner cannot be accurately followed since it seems that the urge to translate the American author passed to Spain. Approaching Faulkner's language, the critic argues that if a translator chooses to render the meaning of it as accurately as possible and then transfer it into a standard target structure, the translator will experience conflicts since Faulkner's language will not have the same effect (ibid: 143). One of the problems that translator face (and this applies to translators all over the world) is Faulkner's use of suspense in his writings, a device which blocks the reader's understanding of the plot until the last word is written on the page. Faulkner achieves this effect by separating the subject from the verb by a series of long sentences that "*force the reader to visualize kaleidoscopic fragments of difficult aspects of an image which must be retained in suspension until the last grammatical connection is made and the image coalesces*" (ibid: 144). This withholding of decisive details is seen by Fayen as a violation of Spanish grammatical logic, translators attempting to deal with this problem by either rearranging the structure of the sentence so that the suspense is removed or by using dashes to separate the main clause from the subordinate clauses.

Tackling the issue of Faulkner translations in Norway, Hans Skei (2001) claims that the first Faulkner translation anywhere was the Norwegian translation of *Soldier's Pay* in 1932, a translation done by Hans Heiber.1934 witnesses the translation of *Light in August* which was the last text to be translated until the 50s when Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Then a selection of fourteen short stories was translated including *Sanctuary*, *The Unvanquished* 1950s, *The sound and the Fury*, 1960s,*Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Go Down Moses* etc. The critic himself translated four of Faulkner's novels: *The Hamlet* published in 1996; *The Town*, 1998; *The Mansion*, 2000; *Intruder in the Dust*, 2001 and the children's book *The Wishing Tree*. Like Fayen before him, Skei too mentions some of the difficulties encountered while translating Faulkner such as his long descriptive passages, the change of narrators and narrative perspectives, the oral character of Faulkner's writings, his local expressions or his rich metaphorical language. However, he warns that "*too much respect for Faulkner's text and a translation too close to it which would mean an inflexible and unnatural Norwegian text*" (ibid: 46).

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Dealing with Faulkner's translations, Sanja Bahun (2007) claims that the 1st text by the American author ever translated in a Slavic language appeared in Russia –*That Evening Star* published in 1934. In 1941, the story *That Will be Fine* was the 1st text to be translated into Serbo-Croatian, while *Light in August* was the first novel to 'enter' Yugoslav space. The critic points that by 1970, all Faulkner's novels had been translated into Serbo-Croatian. A more comprehensive reception occurred – as in many other countries – only after 1948, especially after the awarding of the Nobel Prize. After this year most of Faulkner's major works were translated: *Light in August*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Sanctuary*, (1953), *The Bear*, *Knight's Gambit*, 1954, to mention just a few. The critic claims that Faulkner's translation-reception path in Yugoslavia was quite different from that in the Soviet Union: by the time *The Sound and the Fury* was translated into Russian in 1973, it had gone – according to Bahun – through two different translations into Serbo-Croatian. Faulkner's critical reception also differs, the Yugoslavian critics placing a great interest in the question of technique and examining Faulkner's style extensively. They focused mainly on the stream of consciousness technique, the complexity of Faulkner's dialogic structure, the questions of gender and racial identity, his regional character. For Bahun, Yugoslav translation of Faulkner deserves special attention since Yugoslavia served as a channel for the reception of Faulkner in both Central and Eastern Europe. Bahun sums up some of the difficulties encountered by translators in their attempt to translate Faulkner into Serbo-Croatian: the differences in syntax (the fixed sentence-structure of English as opposed to the free-structure of Slavic languages), lexical habits and grammar; the issue of rendering Faulkner's Southern dialects and vision of the South into another cultural space; semantic problems etc.

For Grover and Mowshowitz, the translation of Faulkner's writings into French "*constitutes, on the whole, a happy story with a happy ending*" (1980: 223). The two scholars do not aim to assess Faulkner's French translation, but rather limit their analysis to one novel, *The Sound and the Fury – Le Bruit e la fureur*, translated by Maurice Edgar Coindreau. They mention the Preface to the translation in French written by Coindreau himself (Princeton University, 1937: 7-17), a very revealing document which helps to explain some of the choices of the aforementioned translator. From the very beginning, Coindreau admits that his main concern is to remain faithful to the original text "*without adding any obscurity to an 'already difficult text'*"(ibid: 225). After providing some details about the structure of the novel,

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Coindreau sets out to offer a detailed analysis of Faulkner's stylistic devices. The French professor identifies two main obstacles which deter the translators from achieving absolute fidelity to the original text, namely, the French language and the cultural habits of the French readers (ibid: 226). Grover and Mowshowitz see Coindreau's dilemma as being that of an honest translator "*who understands the original but does not find a way of restating it to those who share his native language and even less in a style to which they are accustomed*" (ibid.). Coindreau translated in an era when the French cultural dominance was over and the French literature entered the age of the American novel. The result was an increase in the demand for everything that was American, especially after 1945, facilitating thus the reading of Faulkner into French. But as the scholars so openly put it, in 1937, Coindreau's colossal task of translating such a novel presented difficulties hard to overcome, one of which being what he calls "dialect noir" – black dialect (Coindreau, Preface, 1937: 17):

> It would take a creative writer to find a French equivalent of the poetic and emotional flavor of the original, which is composed of three ingredients traditionally alien to the French but closely related in the English language: the poetry of the King James version of the Bible (primarily the New Testament), the poetry of Shakespeare, and the poetry of the Negro spiritual (1980: 228).

Both critics consider that by refusing to transpose the Negro way of speaking into a French equivalent, Coindreau "*loses the multi-dimensional aspect of these overlays*" (ibid: 231). In sum, Grover and Mowshowitz claim that Coindreau's translations of Faulkner deserve high praise since they allow French writers to get acquaintance with the work of a highly original writer.

Another critic to tackle the issue of Faulkner translations into French, François Pitavy aims at examining the process of translation of a literary text from production to reception (2008). Pitavy views translation as a two-way process: "*a given text, after having been received, re-created at a remove, and viewed from a different standpoint, with the distance of a different language and culture, may be read anew back in its original place, language and culture*" (ibid: 84). Like his fellow countrymen Grover and Mowshowitz, Pitavy acknowledges the role played by Coindreau in making Faulkner available to the French reader, the French professor being the author of the first article on Faulkner in French, in 1931. The critic mentioned *Sanctuary* as the first Faulkner novel translated into French which appears in 1933, to be followed by *As I Lay Dying*, published in 1934. Such translations – Pitavy claims – were an 'important mediator' for the European reader and public at a time when they were not so familiar with English (ibid: 86).

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Due to well-known critics such as Malraux, Coindreau, Sartre, Green, Camus, Faulkner's image in France was that of:

> A great poet of man's tragic predicament, a novelist brilliantly juggling with time and points of view, creating new forms as the real objects of fiction writing (with would later be the ambition of the French *Nouveau Roman*) – at once a great storyteller and a bold modernism…a writer's writer (ibid: 87)

If before World War II the texts that were translated were the non-Yoknapatawpha novels, after the Nobel Prize, the great novels about the history of the South started to be translated: *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1953, *Go Down Moses* in 1955, *The Hamlet* in 1959. During this period, Faulkner was perceived as a universal, modern writer rather than a regional writer, a novelist anchored in his infamous South: "*the Americans and the French were not reading quite the same Faulkner not only because of the differences in the availability of the texts, but also because each country (and each language) had constructed for itself its own Faulkner*" (ibid.). Pitavy states that the peak of Faulkner's reputation in France came in 1950-1952 with nine translations published between 1946 and 1953. Further in the economy of the text, Pitavy discusses some of the difficulties encountered in the translation from English into French: the English vocabulary, for example, is about twice as rich as the French one; the grammatical differences (for example in French they only have feminine and masculine, hardly any neutral gender); the French word-order is less flexible than in English; 'foreign' words may have different connotations from those in the source language; some terms may simply not have a French counterpart – which leads to a loss of layers of meaning, etc. (ibid: 89-90). Analyzing the translations of Faulkner, Pitavy mentions two great names, Coindreau and Raimbault, both major translators of the American author's texts. The critic considers that the above-mentioned translators tamed Faulkner's language to make it coherent for the French reader not familiar with the modernist American novel; they tried to maintain 'the mesh' of French grammar and syntax; cut long sentences into smaller fragments by using countless commas "*so as to produce in fine a Faulkner less foreign to the French language*" (ibid: 92).

The first text translated in German was *Light in August – Licht im August*, translated by Franz Fein (published in 1935 by Ledig-Rowohlt, a 27 year old junior publisher) – a novel which has remained Faulkner's most widely read novel in Germany to this day (Nicolaisen and Göske, 2008). The novel was followed by *Pylon* –Wendemarke in 1936 and *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1938.

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The two critics view the decision to introduce Faulkner to the German reader in 1935 as a bold move in many respects: for instance, the difficulty of translating Faulkner's poetic prose, or the fact that the nationalist literary scene in the German Reich did not welcome foreign literature or the experimental modernism for that matter, many books by American writers being considered 'harmful and undesired' (ibid: 64). Nicolaisen and Göske view Fein's translation of *Light in August* as often deviating from Faulkner's cadenced syntax and tending to "*transform his coined compounds into more regular structures* (ibid: 65):

> Read side by side, the German text is bound to pale next to Faulkner's rich prose; some dialogue passages, in particular, feel rather stilted. Yet one must bear in mind that Faulkner's handling of dialect, the vernacular and various idiosyncratic mind styles is notoriously difficult to render adequately in any other language (ibid.).

Georg Goyert, the translator of *Pylon* is viewed by the two critics as well-equipped for the task but still facing difficulties when translating the stream-of-consciousness passages. The translator of *Absalom, Absalom!* enjoyed a positive portrayal. Herman Stresau's version is described as being more conservative than the original, the translator preferring a style more elaborate than Faulkner's, especially in dialogues. In 1943, Rowohlt's publishing house was closed by the Natzi party and the translation rights for most of Faulkner's texts went to Fretz and Wasmuth, Artemis or Scherz and Goverts. By Faulkner's death, almost all of his books were made available to the German reader, this being the result of the positive critical reception the novelist had enjoyed. The German critics claim that after World War II, there was a tendency among critics to neglect the so-called regional themes in Faulkner's writings or his engagement with the history of the South, and turn their attention to the role of 'faith' (ibid: 72). Nicolaisen and Göske conclude that nowadays, unfortunately, the German-speaking country seems to have lost interest in Faulkner, even if his presence is still felt in the work of many German writers. They suggest following the French example and encourage the German publishers to update his translations restoring his status in Germany.

Don Doyle (2000) claims that in Italy, the first translation appeared in 1937, *Pylon – Oggy si vola*, translated by L Gigli. 1939 marked the publication of *Luce d'agosto* (*Light in August*) translated by Elio Vittorini and three years, Cesare Pavese translated *The Hamlet – Il borgo*. Between 1937 and 1971, no less than 24 books were translated, making the American author accessible to Italian readers and establishing him as a major American novelist. For

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Doyle, the reason for this positive reception – even in a period when Faulkner did not enjoy much recognition in his own country – was that Faulkner seemed to resonate with Italian readers, the world he described being somehow familiar to them. That Faulkner uses his native land and the people inhabiting it as the source for his fiction is a well-known fact. Faulkner carefully places his characters within particular sociological layout, "*one stratified most clearly by class, race, and gender*" (ibid: 106), language (dialect and folk expressions in particular) being seen as the device Faulkner uses to place his characters in their specific historical and social location (ibid: 107). Doyle describes the language used by Faulkner's heroes as "*earthy, unrefined, and often grammatically incorrect, or let us say 'creative'"*(ibid.). Such language may pose challenges to the Italian translator: terms such as "ain't", the double negation, the confusion of singular and plural, the use of words that nowadays are considered politically incorrect such as "nigger", the use of black dialect are just a few examples Dylan discusses in his essay in an attempt:

> to show how much of the real meaning of Faulkner's writing is deeply embedded in a particular social and historical context. Much is unavoidable lost when the language must be translated from its native habitat to foreign soil. I would hasten to add that much more is gained by making this rich literature accessible to Italian readers who might otherwise not know anything of the fiction of William Faulkner (ibid: 112).

However in Romanian, Faulkner was translated for the first time relatively late, in 1962, Fănuş Neagu and A. Leicand translating *The Mansion*. However, according to the Romanian Academy's *Chronological Dictionary of Novels Translated in Romanian from the Beginnings to 1989* (2005), Faulkner was one of the novelist most frequently translated in Romanian. Therefore, it shouldn't come as a surprise that almost all of Faulkner's work was translated in Romanian by well-known scholars such as Mircea Ivănescu, Radu Lupan, Eugen Barbu, Andrei Ion Deleanu, Anca Peiu, to mention just a few. Muntean Dragoş (1972) claims that translating a novel written by Faulkner is a daring process, marked by insurmountable difficulties. His text abounds in musical whispers, endless sentences characterized by inner rhythms. Faulkner' words answer some questions or presumptions which rise from the fathomless and haunted depths of some special mental cases. For the Romanian critic, the meaning of the sentences is no longer literal, but it must be looked for in suggestions, sometimes hard to control. Ana Cartianu (1974) claims that the Romanian translators had to struggle with endless introspection – rendered

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intermittently or torrentially – with leaps in time, dialectic speech or the stuttered way of speech of some subhuman specimens. When it comes to translating Faulkner's regional novels, Oana-Celia Gheorghiu states that: "*one of the greatest difficulties in translating American literature is represented by the servants' dialect. The translator is forced in this case to resort to domestication, making the text look like an illiterate Romanian language*" (2015: 56).

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