

ALEX GOLDIȘ – ȘTEFAN BAGHIU (eds.): Translations and Semi-Peripheral Cultures. Worlding the Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System

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The publication *Translation and Semi-Peripheral Cultures: Worlding the Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System*, edited by Alex Goldiș and Ștefan Baghiu from the Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu, brings together twelve studies that deal mainly with (but are not limited to) different aspects of the translation of the novel. While the title of the collection suggests that the Romanian novel is the central topic, it also offers studies on foreign-language novels translated (or in some cases untranslated) into Romanian, as well as on poetry and literary anthologies. In terms of content and editorship, it is a continuation of *The Culture of Translation in Romania/Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien* from 2018 (reviewed in issue 4/2019 of *World Literature Studies*).

The idea of the volume is based on the Goethean premise that “national literatures exhaust their resources when they refuse contact with other cultures”. It also draws on David Damrosch’s concept of the “fertilization” (15) of domestic literary production by translation, which according to Goldiș and Baghiu has not historically been reflected in the way that histories of Romanian literature have been conceived and carried out. For the editors, the novel is the most suitable genre for a translational reading of Romanian literature, mainly because of the dynamics of its development, but also because of its capacity to trigger changes in the literary system. Moreover, translation transforms the novel into a privileged space of negotiation between the local and the in-

ternational. However, according to Goldiș and Baghiu, the role of translation in the formation of the national literary system has been studied unsystematically and without adequate tools of analysis in Romania. Thus, in the space of this book, the methodological tools of descriptive translatology, quantitative literary studies (distant reading, macroanalysis and quantitative approach) and concepts of world literature are used by the individual authors to question not only the role of translation in the Romanian literary system, but also the dependence of Romanian literature on translations and the national policies regarding translation in specific time frames, the defense mechanisms of the target culture against cultural hegemony, the principles of selection, literary assimilation and integration, resistance to certain subgenres, the function of translation in specific moments of the development of Romanian literature. In doing so, several authors refer in their quantitative research to the existing and monumental dictionary works produced by the literary studies institutes of the Romanian Academy of Sciences: *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România de la origini la 1989* (The chronological dictionary of the translated novel from its origins to 1989, Doru Burlacu et al. 2005), *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România: 1990–2000* (The chronological dictionary of the translated novel: 1990–2000, Ioan Milea et al. 2017), *Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice: 1919–1944* (The dictionary of the relationships of

the Romanian literature with foreign literatures, Ana-Maria Brezuleanu et al. 1997–2009).

The four chapters in the first part, entitled “The Uneven Exchange within World Literature”, offer variations on the fundamental findings of the contemporary literary historiography and translation studies presented here. In particular, there is the intriguing case of the organic presence of an untranslated foreign work in the receiving culture. Influenced by Franco Moretti’s metaphor of “waves” for imitations and translations circulating in the system of world literature, Ștefan Baghiu’s chapter “Exaptive Translations: The Change in Function of Imported Novels over Time” adapts the theory of evolutionary-biological exaptation to the refunctionalization of (literary) works. Taking the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as an example, he shows actualizing moments in the interpretation of the text that shifted the political message to a level acceptable, for example, to the demands of socialist realism. Another kind of “exaptation” in the Romanian literary system, according to the author, is represented by the imitations of narrative techniques from the works of Honoré de Balzac and Marcel Proust, which contributed abundantly to the modernization of the Romanian novel. However, these works were only translated after the originals had already been imitated and discussed by Romanian authors and critics, and the translations were thus read through the functions attributed to them by means of the imitations.

In the chapter “Writing Transnational Histories of ‘National’ Literatures: Baudelaire and Proust as Romanian Authors”, Andrei Terian comes up with a bold concept. Starting from the assumptions of the “transnational turn” in comparative studies, he first argues for the legitimacy of “national” literatures as a subject of literary scholarship, but on the assumption that each literature will also be considered implicitly transnational. In contrast to David Damrosch’s concept of world literature as literature circulating in translation, howev-

er, Terian offers the case of two French authors whose works had a “catalytic” effect on the Romanian literary field in the originals even without translations, and, moreover, without their unanimously positive reception by Romanian critics. On this basis, Terian proposes a redefinition of the established definition of world literature: “The factor that truly differentiates (and canonizes) them [authors] is not the extent to which an author becomes known in as many cultures as possible; it is the degree in which a writer is assimilated by various foreign cultures into their most intimate recesses. [...] What is, then, world literature? It is – at least from a certain point of view – the canon of the ‘catalytic authors’ from various national literatures. Or, to put it differently, it is the group of ‘transnational’ authors who succeeded in becoming ‘national’ authors in other literatures than those that produced them” (54).

Alex Goldiș’s chapter “Import and Translation: The Infrastructure of the Romanian Novel Market in the Twentieth Century” presents the results of statistical research on the impact of imported foreign novel production on Romanian literary production in the 20th century. He uses the works of selected authors (Tolstoy, Proust, Dostoevsky, Gide) to show that cultural importation does not happen only through translations and “that hegemonic relationships between literatures constitute the main prerequisite of cultural exchange” (57). In doing so, he disputes Franco Moretti’s claims and the results of descriptive translation studies because they do not take into account other cultural interferences besides the existing data on translated works: “The fact that most of nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals saw Romanian literature as partaking [of] the same ecosystem as French literature triggered the mechanism of import without the mediation of translation” (71–72). However, Goldiș does not explain in his quantitative analysis whether he reached specific numbers and names on the basis of the frequency of occurrence in particular dictionary work, nor how he weighted them.

In his chapter “Transnational Networks, Translational Canons: Foreign Literatures in the Romanian Interwar Periodical Culture”, Emanuel Modoc tries to establish, on the basis of network theory, the translational network in Romanian interwar periodicals. Lacking digitized data, he makes use of the aforementioned lexicographical tools. He first familiarizes himself with his “dataset”, then separates and interprets the data according to the criterion of quantity and through network analysis, and determines the visibility (“popularity”) of the author on the basis of the translations, and the “prestige” of the author according to the number of articles and discussions of his or her literary work. Finally, he proposes a theoretical model which he calls “translation canon formation” in “peripheral” culture and its role in the development of local cultural production. Interestingly, the author raises the issue of “inter-literary relations” (76), but seems unaware that the term “interliterary relations” was developed in another “semi-peripheral” culture, by the Slovak literary scholar Dionýz Ďurišin.

The second part of the volume, entitled “Market Selection and Inter-peripheral Imports”, opens with Adriana Stan’s chapter “The Rise of Realist Novel in Romanian Literature: Translations, Foreign Models, Ideologies”. In it, the author highlights the different ideological trends in Romanian literary criticism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, their role in the reception of realist literature from two “centers” – France and Russia – and the ways in which they were rejected, incorporated or imitated in the domestic environment. In doing so, she shows how proponents of both autochthonism and populist ideas tended to lean towards the Russian realist model (often read and promoted, but also popularized by French or German translation) to varying degrees. This was largely out of a so-called “colonization anxiety” (a term used by Andrei Terian in *The Culture of Translation in Romania*) toward the historically dominant French literary model. Stan draws attention to the fact that translations

have in many ways substituted for the shortcomings of ideologized literary movements, as well as for the hybridization of both social conditions (emerging capitalism mixed with patriarchal structures) and the art forms of realism.

Stan’s chapter is followed by Daiana Gărdan’s contribution “A Literary Form and Its Peripheral Uses: (French) Naturalism in Romania and Brazil”, where the author draws on circulating translations of Émile Zola, an important author in discussions of Romanian understanding of realism, to construct a genre model whose reach she traces in literatures as distant and “peripheral” as those she considers Brazilian and Romanian. By comparing two early 20th-century works (Euclid da Cunha’s *Os Sertões*, 1902, and Liviu Rebreanu’s *Răscoala*, 1932), she shows the local remodeling of the main ideas of naturalism, which served these authors as a convenient means of legitimizing the modernization of “peripheral” agrarian and rural communities.

Ana Țăranu and Claudiu Turcuș’s chapter, “Exceptionally Dysfunctional: The Reception of American Literary and Political Imagery in the Interwar Romanian Press”, uses the delayed reception of American socially oriented literature in leftist periodicals of the interwar period as an example. At that time the American literary tradition was seen not only as an alternative to the Russian one but was considered as equally young or “peripheral” as the Romanian. What was created by American leftist movements and art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was only adopted by the Romanian socialists in the aftermath of the Great Depression, whose amplifying effect is reflected in this reception.

From the regional perspective, the most interesting study is perhaps Cosmin Borza’s “Peripheral Modernism: The Interwar Translation of East-Central Novels in Romania”, in which the author asks whether the Romanian interest in the literary cultures incorporated into the so-called Soviet bloc after World War II represented an alternative to Western modernity/modernism, or whether

this interest became only its marginal echo (151). The numbers of translated works are strikingly lower than those from the literatures discussed in other chapters (ten novels from Hungarian, nine from Polish, one from Bulgarian, two from Yugoslavia, and six from Czechoslovakia). The author supports this calculation with journal articles and studies that were intended to contextualize the reception of the works, or to present a separate, often ideologically selective, representative panorama of the literature in question. He notes that apart from Hungarian literature, where aesthetic distance from social (politically conflicted) reality was also demanded through translations, in the selection from other Central and Eastern European literatures “regional solidarity prevailed, and the novel reveals its realist-nationalist tendency as well as its critical and socially emancipatory function at the expense of modernist aesthetics. [...] Milo Urban, Jozef Cíger-Hronský [...] thus present an alternative, often critical, rather than a simple reflection of Western modernism” (163).

Ovio Olaru’s study “Translating the North: From Norientalism to Interperipherality” begins with an enumeration of stereotypical images and a rhetorical question about what Romanian and Nordic cultures may have in common, before answering that strange similarities exist and stem from the position of these spaces within a closed European “world” system: distance from an influential “center” (167). The theoretical socio-critical assumptions here collide with the comparison of literatures as export articles, with an implicit description of their low level (at least in the case of Romanian literature). At the same time, this perspective fails to differentiate the changing boundaries and roles between the “center/centers” and the “periphery” over time, i.e. in different periods, which, according to later interpretations, were different. Finally, the author offers three patterns of “interperipherality”, three types of literary transfer: direct, taking place in the interwar and postwar periods either through philo-German ideology or

socialist cosmopolitanism; indirect, or mediated through the Western book market; and a third, based on so-called structural similarities or homologies, mainly related to postmodern nostalgia or autobiographical ultra-realism.

The third part, entitled “Social Entanglement and Cultural Transfer”, begins with Ioana Moroșan’s chapter “Romanian Women Writing Abroad: The Translation of the Novel Written by Women during the Socialist Realist Era”. The author writes in a sociological manner about the situation in the Romanian literary field in the 1950s. She notes the gendered marginalization of women (insofar as they entered the field at all through the ideologically motivated steps of a set cultural policy) to the fringes of the literary system, for example, through the denomination of the genres written by them as inferior, sentimental, or by the provision of a remit in the field of children’s literature, etc.

Snejana Ung’s study “Translating Literature about Former Yugoslavia into Romanian: The Role of Literary Prizes and Festivals” analyzes the quantitative distribution in the Romanian book market of so-called post-Yugoslav literature that thematizes the war conflict: i.e., not only books in the languages of the former Yugoslavia, but also those from other literatures that have touched upon the subject (the corpus includes 21 books in eleven languages). On the basis of source (language) distribution, the author notes heterogeneity but also unevenness, which “points to the effects of globalization in the production and circulation of literary works and hence to the need to understand this unequal distribution in relation to the core-periphery model [...] dominated by English” (206). The main pillars of her study, however, are the institutions of literary prizes and literary festivals and their impact on literary transfer: whether or not international prizes have a major impact on translation production, domestic literary festivals and the physical participation of authors are directly conditioned by translation, or translation often follows in quick succession.

Crina Bud's study, "Revising the National Literary History: Three Anthologies of Romanian Literature Translated into French", uses the methodological basis of the German school of descriptive historical translation studies to study the interference of literary anthologies with literary history. It provides a comparatist perspective on the different images of Romanian literature in the French translations produced by anthologies (especially by their compilers) in various historical periods, with the differences being based either more on the target group (other evaluation for the domestic audience than for the foreign audience) or on political order. She calls this phenomenon cultural resemantization. Bud is the only one of the contributors to the volume to allude to and, in the conclusion, highlight the importance of the actors involved – compilers, translators, authors of accompanying texts – and their agency.

With the publication *Translation and Semi-Peripheral Cultures: Worlding the Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System*, Romanian scholars show again their potential to absorb new concepts and methods in the field of translation studies and world literature research in an erudite and creative way. The studies in the volume allude to Franco Moretti and Marko Juvan's thesis of "peripheral" and "(semi)peripheral cultures", built on the sociological philosophy of Immanuel Wallerstein. They place Romanian literature on the one hand with the "peripheral", on the other hand with the "(semi)peripheral", or even with both sets, but without

a clearer, let alone critical, view of this hegemonic hierarchy. However, the material analyses themselves (e.g. in Terian and Goldiş) also show the weaknesses of these theoretical concepts: first of all, they demonstrate that the quantitative analysis of translations completely excludes other ways of disseminating world literature in the local (national) context (e.g. through the originals). Another major drawback of quantitative approaches is quite clearly shown to be the so-called domination of the data by "central/core literatures", while marginal "semi- and peripheral literatures" remain, unless they are clustered in regional configuration, unnoticed, below the critical level of perceptibility. Looking at such approaches from other "(semi)peripheral literatures" leaves the reader to draw the bitter conclusion that although doubtless well-intended, such products of research make the "(semi)periphery" visible in the eyes of the "center" only by confirming this commodifying and hegemonizing binarity. The collection unquestionably makes Romanian thinking about literature and translation more visible and, once again, somewhat more strongly captures it in the transnational network of world literature.

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