

Policies and Strategies for Translating and Promoting some
Romanian Authors in the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Space: Ion
Creangă and Mircea Cărtărescu

Our thesis, *Policies and Strategies for Translating and Promoting some Romanian Authors in the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Space: Ion Creangă and Mircea Cărtărescu* approaches a research segment that is still at its early beginnings, namely the policies of translation and promotion of the Romanian literature in the Anglo-Saxon cultural space (Great Britain, the United States of America and, to a lesser extent, Canada).

Most studies dedicated to the cultural exchanges between Romania and other cultural spaces approach the translation and reception of foreign literatures in Romania, the investigation of the cultural policies and strategies by means of which Romania has tried, throughout time, to promote its own literary values, unfortunately still occupying a minor position (T. Lăcătușu, 2000, I. Popa 2010). This state of affairs confirms, once again, the existence of asymmetrical relationships between the so-called “major” and “minor cultures” which accounts for the difficulties in promoting these latter’s cultural values through translation.

Thus, the novelty of our approach derives precisely from approaching this research theme from the perspective of the “minor” culture, in this case, the Romanian one, which, compared to the great Anglo-Saxon cultures, has been forced, throughout time, to formulate various cultural policies – adapted to the various historical periods – in order to promote its literary values.

The case studies illustrating this approach are the English translations of a canonical Romanian literary work, *Amintiri din copilărie* by Ion Creangă, carried out in the period between the two world wars by Lucy Byng (*Recollections from Childhood*, London, 1930), and in the communist period by A.L. Lloyd (*Recollections*

from Childhood, London, 1956) and Ana Cartianu and R.C. Johnston (Bucharest, 1978); the translation of a contemporary work, *Nostalgia* by Mircea Cărtărescu, in Julian Semilian's translation (New York, 2005) was analysed for the post-communist period.

Our research concerning the translation and promotion of the Romanian literature in the Anglo-Saxon cultural space for the historical periods considered is based on key concepts and elements derived from various directions in translation studies: elements of the norm theory – G. Toury, the polysystems theory – I. Even-Zohar, various aspects of the manipulation theory – A. Lefevere, T. Hermans, the asymmetrical relations between literatures and the concept of “cultural authority” (A. Lefevere, L. Venuti), cultural policies, issues of minority and the impact of globalisation – Michael Cronin, as well as a socio-economic perspective (G. Sapiro, J. Heilbron) on the promotion of the Romanian literature in the Anglo-Saxon cultural space.

As far as translation criticism and assessment is concerned, our analysis was based on the pragmatic and functional orientations in translation studies (C. Nord), as well as on cultural directions allowing for an investigation of the context of translation production and promotion. In the analysis of the translations, we also held in view the translators’ strategies: the orientation predominantly towards the source or the target culture, the strategies used in dealing with the cultural terms, which can emphasize, or, on the contrary, obscure the specificity of Romanian culture – with all the resulting ideological consequences.

The structure of the thesis corresponds to the three stages in the history of Romania held in view. Each chapter analyses the historical, political and cultural context of the pre-communist (the beginning of the 20th century), communist and post-communist periods, with a view to identify, on the one hand, the cultural policies, and, more precisely, the translation policies that (have) functioned in Romania over the respective periods, and, on the other, to justify the translation strategies, dictated, more often than not, by these policies.

The notion of “translation policy” is considered in this study in the sense referred to by Gideon Toury, who regards it as comprising the factors involved in the selection of source text types, individual source texts, authors, schools, genres, source languages, etc. “to be imported through translation into a particular culture/ language at a particular point in time” (Toury 1995: 202). G. Toury considers the translation policies of a culture at a certain time to be so important that, in his classification, he calls them **preliminary norms**. The preliminary norms precede the textual-linguistic ones, applied during the translation process.

Moreover, André Lefevere, a translator scholar interested, primarily, in the ideological dimension of translation, assigns a highly important role to the translation policies practised by a certain culture at a particular moment, explicitly pointing out the institutions in charge with establishing these policies. In the case of Romania, for instance, there were either political documents based on which the publishing houses built their translation policies (the communist period), or these policies took the form of cultural projects initiated by various institutions (for instance, the programs developed by the Romanian Cultural Institute during the post-communist period).

The translation policies reveal, at the same time, asymmetrical relations between cultures. Before Venuti, Lefevere had already introduced the concept of cultural authority. Historical, political and economic factors have allowed some cultures to acquire the status of “major” or “hegemonic culture”. Such cultures tend to publish fewer translations, relying primarily on internal resources. For instance, only 2-7% of the books published by the American publishing houses are works in translation (the percentage includes all fields, not just literary translations), while in Romania, the percentage can grow over 50%, which proves an obvious asymmetry between the translation policies of peripheral cultures, compared to the so-called “major” cultures.

In the pre-communist period (discussed in the first chapter of our thesis – *Translating and Promoting Romanian Literature between the Two World Wars*), we cannot talk about a coherent translation and

promotion policy, organised at institutional level, but rather of personal initiatives carried out by outstanding cultural and political personalities, such as Queen Marie of Romania or Marcu Beza, as well as other cultural bridgeheads, such as Dragoş Protopopescu, Moses Gaster, Sir Sacheverell Sitwell, etc.

There was, during all this time, a constant effort from the Royal House and Queen Marie to make our culture and literature known, through translation, to the British readership. The presence of Marcu Beza in London, first as Romanian General Consul in Great Britain, then as a cultural advisor of the Romanian Legation, contributed greatly to this aim; Marcu Beza delivered speeches on the Romanian culture and literature, published literary works, papers and translations and he signed prefaces.

The reduced number of authors and works translated (17 books and 11 authors translated into English), confirms the minor position Romania occupied at the time at international level (as a newly formed state, scarcely known in Europe), and thus reveals the unequal translation flows which are intrinsic to the relation between major and minor languages and cultures.

As it is also shown in our thesis, during this period, the translations from the Romanian literature were published exclusively by foreign publishing houses, the preferred texts being those short stories that best foregrounded the originality of the Romanian culture. Through the adjusting strategies used, the translators – few in number and (mostly) English native speakers – were orienting their translations towards the values of the target culture. The analysis of the 1930 translation of Ion Creangă's *Recollections* carried out by Lucy Byng is a clear example in this respect. This translation, not accidentally prefaced by the writer and diplomat Marcu Beza, had, just like the others translations published at the time, an important strategic role, since the Romanian monarchy and diplomacy was trying to forge political alliances with the strong European countries, through a better cultural understanding via literature.

This explains, for instance, the absence of footnotes for the Romanian cultural terms, the neutralisation of these specific terms

through more general ones (*buhai – drums, satul Humulești – the town of Humuleshti, plugușorul – Christmas Carols, horă – tune, șezătoare – re-union, uliță – street, știoalună – pool*), or the naturalisation of some cultural terms (*vornic – sheriff, oca – ounce, para – centime, Smărândița – Esmeralda*). Adaptation, the preferred translation strategy, was aimed at bringing the Romanian text closer to the British readership, facilitating their understanding of the Romanian literature and culture.

The conclusions to Chapter 1 refer to the fact that, during the pre-communist period, the personal initiatives of the political and cultural ambassadors of Romania (be they translators, critics or Maecenas – representing a form of “differentiated patronage” in A. Lefevere’s terminology) took the form of “imposition” of the Romanian literature in the target culture. According to Cay Dollerup (1997), the translation imposed in the target culture (“translation as imposition”) is a constant of the so-called “minor” cultures, the translation requisitioned by the target culture (“translation as requisition”) being rather the attribute of the “major” cultures, those enjoying “cultural authority”.

During the communist years (discussed under Chapter Two of our thesis, *Translating and Promoting Romanian Literature in the Communist Period*), the personal initiatives in promoting the Romanian literature and culture in the Anglo-Saxon space turned into what Lefevere (1992) called an “undifferentiated type of patronage” exerted exclusively by the Romanian communist state.

Providing all the financial resources necessary for the propagation of culture abroad, the State monopolised the right to “select” the works to be exported, relying on an all-too efficient tool – censorship.

During this period, the nationalist orientation of communism in Romania was also testified by the intense translation and retranslation of the “classical” works belonging to the Romanian literary canon, which could foreground the Romanian specificity, *Amintiri din copilărie* being an eloquent example in this respect. Minerva Publishing House in particular was in charge of publishing these

translations which were produced in Romania, and then sent abroad. During the communist years, the translators were professionals and many times the so-called ideal translator team was used, consisting of one Romanian native speaker and one target language native speaker. This is the case, for instance, with the 1978 edition of Ion Creangă's *Amintiri din copilărie* (*Memories of My Boyhood*), translated by Ana Cartianu and R.C. Johnston. In agreement with the nationalist ideology, the orientation was mainly towards the source culture, i.e. the Romanian one.

Compared to the 1930 translation of *Amintiri din copilărie*, the translations made by A.L. by A.L. Lloyd (1956) and Ana Cartianu and R.C. Johnston (1978) reveal a strong source culture orientation, visible again especially in the treatment of cultural terms. Therefore, instead of domesticating or adapting, the translators in the communist period chose to resort either to in-text explicitations or to footnotes.

In the case of the two English versions analysed for this period, we can argue that the more recent the translation, the higher the number of footnotes (35 footnotes and in-text explicitation for the 1978 translation, compared to 26 footnotes and explicitations for the 1956 edition). Despite the disadvantage of slowing down the reading speed and “interrupting” the readers, this strategy has the advantage of broadening the readers’ cultural background. Without any explanations and footnotes, Creangă’s text, laden with cultural references, would probably be fully accessible to an even more limited category of readers.

In A.L. Lloyd’s translation (*Recollections from Childhood*, 1956), footnotes and explicitations were used for cultural or religious terms, names, or proverbs (e.g.: *colivă* – a sweetmeat given as an offering for the souls of the dead. Made of boiled wheat, honey and ground nuts; *opinci* – Home-made peasant shoes, in the style of mocassins; *hora* – The collective round-dance which is an important feature of south-east European village life on Sunday afternoons and holidays, *Moși* – A popular rite, falling on the Saturday before Whitsun, when offerings are made for the souls of the dead, etc.).

In Ana Cartianu and R.C. Johnston's translation (*Memories of My Boyhood*, 1978), additional footnotes were employed for terms such as: *glasurile* – church chants (*The eight fundamental melodies at the basis of church singing in the Greek Orthodox service*); *mânzii popei* – the priest's foals (*It is usual in Romanian for young boys to be called foals or colts*), *lei* (*leu*, plural *lei*: the monetary unit of Romania); *Alexandria*, *baba Dochia*, *ouăle roșii* (*Greek Orthodox custom, accompanied by the words: Christ is risen! to which the reply is: "He is risen indeed!"*), *prăjină* (unit of measurement), *cârneleagă*, *poște*. These SC-oriented strategies were aimed, in fact, at familiarizing the Anglo-Saxon readers with the realities of the Romanian culture.

During the communist years, translated Romanian literature was heavily promoted in the hope of making it better known all around the world. Financed by the state and oriented towards the source culture (according to the cultural and ideological discourse of the time), it constituted another form of imposition (in Dollerup's terms), carried out this time at the level of state institutions. The "imposition" of Romanian literature through state policies turned out to be more fruitful, especially since the number of translated books increased to 75 during this period.

In the post-communist era (discussed in Chapter Three, *Translating and Promoting Romanian Literature in the Post-Communist Period*), the "imposition" – much more subtle than in the previous periods – was carried out at the initiative ("differentiated patronage") of important cultural institutions, such as the Romanian Cultural Institute, but also by means of smaller projects, such as the *Observer Translation Project*, initiated by the *Observer Cultural* magazine, or the project *Contemporary Romanian Writers*, managed by the Polirom publishing house.

Of the three analysed initiatives, the Romanian Cultural Institute stands out through the extent and the diversity of its projects, aimed not only at translation proper, but also at translation publishing and translators training. Impressive is also the number of translations, whose publication was undoubtedly facilitated by the Institute – 64

translations into English, of a total of 337 books translated in 24 languages.

In the post-communist period, besides supporting translation proper, the new “imposition” has also taken the form of participations in international book fairs, meetings with publishers from various linguistic areas, meetings with authors and translators and, generally, efforts to ensure the presence of the Romanian writers at international cultural events. The translation policies in the post-communist years, betray, again, a predominantly target culture orientation of the translations, which is also visible in the adaptation to the international book market’s requirements, in the selection of both authors and books to be “exported” through translation.

The case study chosen to illustrate the translation policies functioning in the post-communist years reveals the same target-culture orientation (less obvious than in the 1930 translation of the *Recollections*) which turns the text of *Nostalgia* from an instrument of direct communication with an “ideologically conscientious reader” (Codrescu 2005:xii), into a historical document.

Analysing the policies for the translation and promotion of the Romanian literature in the Anglo-Saxon space which have functioned in Romania since the first half of the 20th century, we can identify three forms of “imposition” – in various degrees – of the Romanian literature into other cultures (see Fig. 1 below). These forms have evolved from the personal initiatives of some important personalities in the period between the two world wars, to the translation and promotion policies practised by the state as an undifferentiated source of patronage governing the selection criteria as well as the promotion and distribution practices in the communist period, and finally, in the post-communist period, to the “imposition” carried out by Romanian cultural institutes, cultural magazines, or publishing houses.

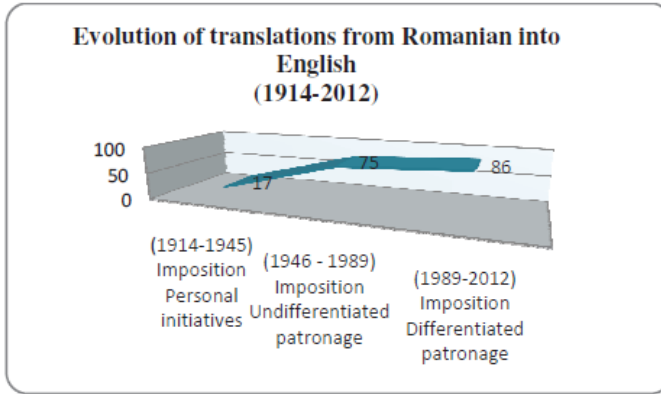


Fig. 1

Moreover, comparing the three periods under discussion, we reached the conclusion that the promotion of a literature abroad through translation depends on the political status and the prestige enjoyed by the source language and culture (at international level), a status likely to grant or deny it the access to the target cultural space. For instance, when a country enjoys a certain prestige, a high political status, this central position either grants it visibility, opening up the interest of other nations in all its manifestations including culture and literature, and thus, translation becomes requisition, or it gives it the (financial) power to impose – through translation – its literary values.

This explains, for instance, the situation of the translations from Romanian in the communist period. The political status Romania enjoyed among the other socialist states in Eastern Europe also guaranteed (by means of cultural agreements) reciprocity in the field of translation. On the other hand, the position of Romania in the West did not allow the establishment of such cultural agreements, leaving the Romanian state the only option to “impose” translations from Romanian by subsidizing their “export”.

Nevertheless, the success (or the failure) of the translation (and, implicitly, cultural) policies depends in the end on the way in which these translations are received in the target cultural space. Therefore, the critical reactions to the translations from the Romanian literature,

as poor as they might be, are an indicator of how effective/ineffective these policies have been, contributing, at the same time, to the shaping of the image of the Romanian literature and culture (and, thus, the image of Romania) in the Anglo-Saxon space. Included together with the translations in the category of “rewritings” (in A. Lefevere’s terminology), the reviews, the critical studies, etc. contribute to creating “the image” of the source literature and culture in the cultural space in which they are “exported” through translation.

Therefore, in the pre-communist period, the critical reactions to the translations from the Romanian contributed to shaping a predominantly positive (although rather foreignizing) image of a “quick-witted” people, a “wild mixture of Dacian and Roman blood”, inhabiting a foreign world, with old-fashioned inns on the side of the roads, a “country that the fairies still hadn’t left” (Protopopescu 1921:2). During the communist period, as we already mentioned in our thesis, the translations from the Romanian literature came out mostly at Romanian publishing houses. Therefore, the paratexts “exported” together with these translations were promoting an image of a country corresponding to the dominant ideology, an image that foregrounded the national distinctiveness. Finally, in the post-communist years – and especially with the European integration – we witnessed an increase in the interest of foreign publications (e.g. the websites *Three Percent*, *Words without Borders*, etc.), which unfortunately still hesitate between preserving a stereotypical image on Romania (Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, the miners’ strikes, the Roma minority, etc.) and appreciating its cultural values.

Moreover, in order to quantify the success of the translation and promotion of the Romanian literature in the Anglo-Saxon cultural space, we included in our thesis a statistical research carried out in a series of important libraries in Great Britain, the United States of America and Canada. These results, correlated with other databases concerning the translation of the Romanian literature into English (we only considered prose literary works) revealed the following figures: for the pre-communist period we identified 17 prose literary works

translated into English, 75 works for the communist period, and 86 works for the post-communist years.¹

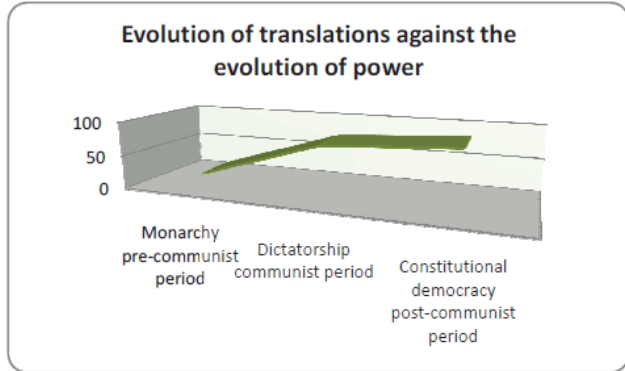


Fig. 2

As it can also be noticed in the graph above, we can argue that the translation of Romanian literature over the three historical periods investigated has constantly followed an ascending line. Although the difference in the number of translations recorded for the communist and post-communist years is not considerable, we should not lose sight of the fact that those 75 works were translated over a period of 43 years, while the 86 translations recorded for the contemporary period were made during no more than 22 years.

The (extremely) reduced number of prose literary works translated into English since the beginning of the 20th century points out, again, the minority position of the Romanian literature and culture compared to the great Anglo-Saxon cultures. Nevertheless, the recent success registered by the translation and promotion policies led by the Romanian Cultural Institute in the post-communist period entitles us to hope that in the future the translations from the Romanian literature may well turn into requisition from foreign publishing houses, and thus, better known abroad.

¹ The results of our research are available in Annex II.