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FEASTING ON THE TEXT: THE *ULYSSES* CENTENARY IN ROMANIAN PERIODICALS

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ABSTRACT. ***Feasting on the Text: the "Ulysses" Centenary in Romanian Periodicals*.** The aim of this paper is to revisit a selection of the Romanian periodical issues dedicated to James Joyce's fiction up until the 1980s. Our investigation of the main themes and topics published before and after the year 1982 reveals an alignment with an already established shift of perception in Joycean studies: the author is glorified as an Irish and/or Irish-European modernist writer whose assignment to a specific, local culture is the pre-condition of his modernity and innovative style.

Keywords*: reception, translation, Romanian periodicals, Irish modernism, the European canon*

REZUMAT. ***Ospățul textual: centenarul James Joyce în publicistica românească***. Lucrarea operează o selecţie a câtorva reviste şi ziare româneşti care au dedicat spaţiu editorial ficţiunii scriitorului James Joyce. Analiza noastră, care face referire inclusiv la câteva dintre temele abordate de aceste reviste în jurul centenarului Joyce, reflectă o schimbare de percepţie în studiile joyceene în general. Această modificare vizează receptarea lui Joyce ca scriitor irlandez şi/sau irlandezo-european a cărui apartenenţă la o cultură specifică este temelia modernităţii şi a inovaţiei sale stilistice.

Cuvinte-cheie*: receptare, traducere, periodice româneşti, modernism irlandez, canonul european*

A survey of some of the key moments in the reception of James Joyce in Romania will automatically offer an overview of the mechanisms involved in the editorial practices concerning the (local) translation and dissemination of

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international canonic writers in the 20th century. The non-linear history of Joyce's reception (in our country, as well as in other parts of the world) records early responses to the Irish writer's fiction and attempts at translating fragments of his works – which are symptomatic for the efforts invested in grasping the meaning of innovative forms of expression. Modernist literature in general and Joyce's texts in particular found an oblique way of gaining the attention of their contemporary readers and critics, which at that time was via translation. Our paper will operate a selection of some of the most illustrative episodes in the century since the serialisation of *Ulysses*, with a focus on the centenary of Joyce's birth and the respective festivities dedicated to accommodating such uneasy literature within the local linguistic, cultural and certain political constraints.

James Joyce had typed the first three episodes of *Ulysses* by March 1918; promises of the novel's serialisation in the United States were confirmed at the end of the same month, when "Telemachus" appeared as "Ulysses I" in the *Little Review*. Fragmentary translation into French would mediate the access of the Joycean text to the Romanian readership. Thus, as early as 1922, Romanian periodicals (*Cugetul românesc* and *Cuvântul*) reacted by denouncing the novel as pornographic. One notable (and slightly belated) exception to the series of negative responses to *Ulysses* was signed by Ion Biberi in his 1935 article published in *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* and simply entitled "James Joyce". Where previous periodicals had identified vulgar material, Biberi would read signs of "authenticity" (of experience and language alike):

> A gaudiness of tone, of language. Any decency of expression, any literary convention gone. These serve when one is in the world, in a certain position, when sparing someone of something or when one wishes to respect the rules. What about when one is naked or alone? Does one still have the time to work on their speech, to follow the rules and observe the norms? (…) Joyce's people, seen on the inside, are very much authentic and alive. (Biberi 1935, 395, my translation)

While Biberi continues to praise Joyce's interior monologue as a reaction against the stylistic norms of the time, which arguably promotes the Irish writer as "the creator of a new poetic alphabet" (1935, 403), he sees *Work in Progress* as a less accessible experiment denounced as artificial:

> In this new *Work in Progress*, the author tries to experiment with a much deeper technical revolution, aiming to work with the very essence of poetic expression: the *word* itself. (…) Verbal genius aside, Joyce's self-conscious construction is deemed artificial. The text loses its fluidity, thus becoming a merely obscure, indecipherable notation. (Biberi 1935, 406, my translation)

Ion Biberi is among the few Joycean readers to articulate an intuition regarding the debates around the exhaustion of the novel as the most suitable means of expressing a new sensibility. What the Romanian writer and critic hints at when describing *Work in Progress* as the "expansion of the *univer-Joyce-au*" (1935, 406, my translation) is this ability of Joyce's fiction to challenge not only the limits of language, but also those of time, as "(…) the novelty of expressive means, the daring authenticity of his creation can only be duly assessed over a longer period of time." (1935, 406, my translation) Biberi additionally alludes to the ongoing debate on the European literary scene about the novel (and its survival) as the most appropriate artistic formula of the time. In the concluding remarks on *Work in Progress*, he states that "[n]either the publication of the volume, nor its translation will bring a definite solution to an open debate." (1935, 406, my translation) Thus, the critic echoes the contemporary concerns about the exhaustion of the novel and its expressive means, José Ortega Y Gasset's *The Dehumanisation of Art* being one of the staple titles in this respect:

> Anyone who gives a little thought to the conditions of a work of art must admit that a literary genre may wear out. (…) It is erroneous to think of the novel – and I refer to the modern novel in particular – as of an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms. Rather it may be compared to a vast but finite quarry. (…) present-day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left them. (Ortega Y Gasset 1968, 57-58)

Biberi's knowledge of the contemporary changes in the literary sensibility, in the cultural and commercial tastes of the readers is by no means singular among the Romanian literati; weekly gazettes such as *Vremea* would occasionally publish a short section entitled "Curierul strein", which featured references to the ongoing European or American polemics and debates. The May 1931 issue of *Vremea*, for example, hosts the well-known French publisher Bernard Grasset's observation that the novelists of the time had lost the creative energies necessary to revitalize a tired and tiresome genre: "We must acknowledge the fact that the audience has grown tired of the novel… In what I am concerned, I have decided to brutally dismiss all false novelistic talents. By that I mean nine out of ten novelists today." (1931, 8, my translation) Ion Biberi's prediction that the test of time would confirm whether the Joycean texts had exhausted all possibilities for the survival of the novel as a genre is later echoed in Romanian periodicals; indeed, a temporal leap of almost five decades entitles Virgil Stanciu to claim that "[…] there was no Joyce model, in the sense that he left no room for similar works to be written […], thus fully exhausting its vision, clearing it of anything it could offer anymore." (1982, 50, my translation) In a recent book review of Mircea Mihăieş's *Ulysses 732*, *Romanul romanului* (Polirom, 2016), Virgil Stanciu reiterates the idea that writers such as Proust or Joyce had opened the door to narrative and stylistic innovation, while, at the same time,

closing it on any potential followers or proselytes. Approaching such works as those pertaining to authors labelled by Moravia "the gravediggers of the 19-century novel" (Bergonzi qtd. in Roberts 2016, 422) became increasingly difficult in countries where editorial practices and censorship only added to the difficulty of accessing certain titles in the original language. Some of the first attempts at translating Joyce into Romanian (usually via French) were published in the 1930 and 1934 issues of *Adevărul literar și artistic* which featured the translation of *Eveline* by two subsequent anonymous translators (known as A. and M. respectively), along with a fragment of *Ulysses* signed by Al. Philippide. The subsequent "silent" decades in the reception of James Joyce in Romania until the mid-1960s can be traced back to the context of Romanian communism. The years following Joyce's death coincided with the intensification of the Stalinist regime, when, as Arleen Ionescu recounts, Joyce's name gradually "disappeared from literary journals which […] failed to absorb and reflect on what the rest of the world has to offer." (Ionescu 2014, 97)

The gap marked by this cultural silence in Romania is bridged by later efforts invested in recuperating Joyce's texts, the years of relative liberalisation and cultural opening (1964-1971) bringing forth certain key developments in the configuration of a Romanian readership. In the process, the role of the cultural and artistic magazine entitled *Secolul 20* was decisive, as it had become one of the most important vehicles for the translation and dissemination of contemporary literature in the years of intense censorship and political propaganda. Despite the fact that it was kept under the close scrutiny of the communist authorities, the magazine still managed to publish a generous amount of "Western material", from philosophy to literature and to performance arts. As Arleen Ionescu shows in her 2014 book on *Romanian Joyce. From Hostility to Hospitality*, several issues of *Secolul 20* were allowed to include translations of Joyce into Romanian from the mid-1960s up until 1984 when the first complete and (to this day only) Romanian version of *Ulysses* eventually saw the light of print. Bridging the translation gap was made possible by a 1965 issue of *Secolul 20* (2/1965), which was entirely dedicated to James Joyce's fiction. While it contained heterogeneous (biographical, critical) material, the editorial event undeniably marked the beginning of a growing interest (though, at times, interrupted) in researching and translating Joyce's works. Issue no. 2/1965 accommodated: translations from *Dubliners* (Frida Papadache), *Chamber Music* (Marcel Breslașu, Tașcu Gheorghiu, Petre Solomon), *Telemachus* (Gellu Naum and Simona Drăghici), critical studies (Dan Grigorescu – *Joyce irlandezul*, Ion Biberi – *Monologul interior la James Joyce*, Simona Drăghici – *Contemporani și urmași* etc.). Frida Papadache completed the translation of *Dubliners* in 1967, while the Romanian version of *A Portrait* was signed by the same translator and published in 1969.

The 1970s issues of *Secolul 20* witnessed the beginning of the serialized translation of *Ulysses* by Mircea Ivănescu or that of the international

canonic studies and approaches to Joyce's fiction which would hail him as a British modernist writer. Issue no. 2/1977, for example, released translations from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (and his claim that Joyce belonged to a pre-determined literature of the English canon, 1977, 50) or from Michel Butor's study on Joyce and the "modern novel". The early 1980s are marked by a change of vision in the pages of *Secolul 20*, particularly with reference to Joyce's reception as an Irish writer, towards acknowledging the existence of an Irish literature and its inclusion in the European literature and culture.

Issue no. 4/1982 marks Joyce's centenary and it represents a piece in the series of UNESCO anniversaries. It is well worth looking into for several reasons, one of the most important being Joyce's canonic status by his inclusion in the Irish-European literary canon. The opening pages recycle extracts from Joyce's "company" of critics, such as: T. S. Eliot, E. Wilson, Yvan Goll, Italo Svevo, V. Larbaud, S. Zweig, W B Yeats, Ezra Pound, Marcel Brion, Carola Giedion-Welcker, Michel Butor or Richard Ellmann. Most of these selections gloss Joyce's blend of Irishness and Europeanism, his belonging to a specific, local culture within a larger, more inclusive tradition. Similar critical approaches will be adopted by Romanian critics and theorists, such as Ion Ianoși, Andrei Brezianu or Radu R. Șerban; the latter celebrates Joyce's irony as quintessentially Irish, since the writer:

> […] often adopted the ironic pose that the Irish background gave him. He often tries to extricate himself from that background, to become a citizen of the globe, but Ireland and Catholicism would remain there, against his will. Fighting against these, Joyce confirms them and himself as an Irishman tied to the prejudice and the austere beauty of Ireland. (Șerban 1982, 82, my translation)

Several key translations find their place in the centenary issue, among which: "Cyclops" (Mircea Ivănescu), "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" (Andrei Ionescu) or Raymond Porter's "The Cracked Lookingglass – Joyce and the Image of Ireland" (Lidia Vianu). Almost twenty years had passed between the first attempt at opening the first pages of *Ulysses* up to the Romanian readership in 1965 and the completion of the translation and subsequent publication of the book in 1984. A comparative reading of the two versions of *Telemachus* (the 1965 version translated by Gellu Naum and Simona Drăghici vs. the 1984 one by Mircea Ivănescu) reveals several differences that become illustrative for the changes in the local translation and editorial practices between the 1960s and the 1980s in Romania. As Arleen Ionescu points out in her book on *Romanian Joyce*, ideological constraints led to several instances of ambivalence and/or (self-) censorship in the process of translation and texts managed to reach a Romanian through a similar bypass:

> Translations from foreign works had somehow to adopt a similarly ambivalent line of conduct and the expedient most resorted to was to

> insert translator's introduction or editorial notes which would proclaim the translator's dislike of, and scorn at, the original context of the literary work. (Ionescu 2014: 155)

With Joyce alone, when textual *loopholing* alone seemed risky, certain words, phrases and, sometimes, even fragments disappeared in the target language as a result of silencing taboos such as sexuality, religion or food/drinks. The first pages of *Ulysses* are a case in point: both the 1965 and the 1984 versions feature ellipses which, on a return to the original text, point to the extraction of some religious lexical items or phrases. Even a superficial reading of the opening pages will reveal the liberties vs. the limitations the translators assumed in the temporal distance which separated them. In the next lines, we offer a brief selection of illustrative fragments.

In Buck Mulligan's parody of the words Jesus uttered to his disciples and mockery of scientism and transubstantiation, the original text quotes:

> He added in a preacher's tone:
> — For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine christine: body and soul and blood and ouns. Slow music, please. (Joyce 1993, 1.20)

In the 1965 version of the paragraph, Gellu Naum and Simona Drăghici opt for a more interpretive translation variant and provide a Romanian equivalent of the medieval blasphemous oath for "blood and ouns" rendered as "fir-ar să fie" ("damn it"), as well as a replacement of "music" with "organ", bringing the register closer to a religious context:

> Şi adăugă pe un ton de predicator:
> — Pentru că aceasta, o, prea iubiţii mei, e cea mai fină Cristină, trupul şi sufletul, *fir-ar să fie.* Mai încet *orga*, vă rog. [(…) body and soul, *damn it; organ playing* slower, please – Joyce 1965, my emphasis]

Mircea Ivănescu, on the other hand, chooses the literal translation of "blood and wounds" and preserves "music" in:

> Adăugă pe un ton de predicator:
> — Căci aceasta, o mult iubiţii mei, este o adevărată Christină: trupul şi sufletul, *şi sângele şi plăgile*. Aicea, *muzica înceată*, vă rog. [body and soul, and *blood and wounds. Music playing slower*, please – Joyce 1984, 5, my emphasis]

A similar mechanism of lexical and semantic expansion/contraction is deployed in the lines where Mulligan irreverently continues his mock re-enactment of the mystery of the Mass: "*He peered sideways* up and gave a *long slow whistle of call*…" (Joyce 1993, 1.24, my emphasis) As in the previous extract, the 1965 translation further manipulates the religious context, with

the lexical pinpointing of "up" as "sky" and an added semantic value of the authoritative register hinted at in the text:

> *Mijindu-şi ochii spre cer*, Buck Mulligan scoase *o şuierătură profundă şi poruncitoare*... [*squinting toward the sky* with *a deep, imperative whistle* – Joyce 1965, my emphasis]

More faithful to the original version, Mircea Ivănescu prefers the focus on the movement rather than (a specific) object and a less ceremonial rendition of the auditory element:

> *Îşi ridică pieziş privirile* şi scoase un şuierat prelung, grav, ca o chemare... [*He gazed upwards sideways* and gave *a long, low whistle, like a call* – Joyce 1984, 5, my emphasis]

At other times, the translator's passing glance gives way to slips of the tongue or errors; one such example is Mulligan's extended invitation to Athens: "We must go to Athens. Will you come if I can get the aunt to fork out twenty quid?" (Joyce 1993, 1.42-3). Interestingly enough, the translation into Romanian seems to be different in the versions dated 1965 and 1984 respectively. Gellu Naum and Simona Drăghici render a less colloquial, albeit (partially) more accurate conversion of the text, with a preference for semi-formal future tense in: „Trebuie să mergem la Atena. *Ai să vii* cu mine dacă se hotărăşte mătuşa să scuipe *douăzeci de lire*?" [We must go to Athens. *Will you come* if my aunt decides to fork out *twenty quid*? – Joyce 1965, my emphasis]. In the 1984 translation, the passage regains the conversational tone of Mulligan's typical discourse, with the present tense (with future meaning) for the verbal invitation and a taste for contracted forms; yet, a translator's error makes its way in the target language (where *twenty quid* becomes *forty quid*): „Trebuie neapărat să mergem la Atena. *Vii şi tu dac-o* conving pe mătuşă-mea să scuipe *patruzeci de lire*?" [We must absolutely go to Athens. *Are you coming* if I get my aunt to fork out *forty quid*? – Joyce 1984, 6, my emphasis].

It has been repeatedly claimed that, by the 1980s, the thematic treatment of sexuality, religion or gastronomy had posed a series of difficulties for authors and translators alike, often leading to efforts of "trimming and re-stylizing any passage" (Ionescu 2014, 168) that would fall prey to controversial interpretation. It seems, therefore, all the more surprising to have the possibility of recovering some of the thematic overtones from previous exercises in translation, such as the 1965 "Telemachus". The exchange between Stephen and Mulligan regarding the presence of the Englishman Haines goes almost unnoticed in both the source language and in the 1984 translation:

> — Tell me, Mulligan, Stephen said *quietly*.
> — Yes, *my love*? (Joyce 1993, 1.47-8 – my emphasis)

> — Spune-mi, Mulligan, zise Stephen încet. [Tell me, Mulligan, Stephen said *quietly*.]
> — Da, *iubitule*? [Yes, *love*? – Joyce 1984, 6, my emphasis]

The previous version, on the other hand, is faithful to the style adopted in the translation of the first episode, in general, with the gradual insertion of lexical items that are inexistent, as such, in the English text, most of which help enhance the ironic treatment in the (mock-) religious register:

> — Ia spune-mi, Mulligan, începu Stephen, *paşnic*. [Tell me, Mulligan, Stephen started *peacefully*.]
> — Ce, *îngeraşule*? [What, *angel*? – Joyce 1965, my emphasis]

The same pattern is repeated in the subsequent lines, where Mulligan's irony is directed at Haines and Stephen both in: "You know, Dedalus, you have the real Oxford manner. He can't make you out. O, my name for you is the best." (Joyce 1993, 1.53-5), where Ivănescu steers away from (religious) allusions with:

> Ştii, Dedalus, *tu* ai adevăratele maniere de Oxford. Ăsta nu reuşeşte să te înţeleagă. O, *tot numele pe care ţi l-am găsit eu e cel mai potrivit*... [You know, Dedalus, *you* have the real Oxford manners. He can't make you out. Still *the name I have found for you is the better one*… – Joyce 1984, 6, my emphasis]

On the other hand, Gellu Naum and Simona Drăghici seize the opportunity to embed the religious element in the semantic assimilation of *naming* and *baptizing*, but prosaically end with a cacophony (*şi încă cum*):

> Tu, Dedalus, tu ai adevăratul stil de Oxford. El nu te poate întrece. *Mai întâi fiindcă te-am botezat eu,* şi încă cum... [You, Dedalus, possess the real Oxford *style*. He can't *outrival* you. First *because I baptised you*… – Joyce 1965, my emphasis]

In her analysis of the Romanian reception of European modernism in general, and Joyce's fiction in particular, Arleen Ionescu revisits Derrida's *hostipitality* (a coinage of *hostility* and *hospitality*), which, in her vision best captures the uneasy transfer of the Joycean text to the Romanian literary market before 1989. Our attempts to mirror the two translations point to the efforts[2] invested in the progressive assimilation of Joyce's modernism at a time when postmodernism was already making an entrance on the international literary scene. Difficult as this process might have been, the 1984 complete translation of *Ulysses* into Romanian is,

[2] As Mircea Mihăieş points out in his 2012 article published in „România literară", entitled "Joyce şi alţi clasici" ["Joyce and Other Classics"], M. Ivănescu did not have access to essential instruments for his translation, such as D. Gifford and R. Seidman's *Ulysses Annotated. Notes for James Joyce's* Ulysses.

to this day, the only one available. Subsequent reprints of the book (1996, 2012) brought nothing new to the content of the translated text. Arleen Ionescu's investigation of *Romanian Joyce* concludes on a positive note by claiming that:

> In spite of, but occasionally perhaps also thanks to, all these alterations, mis/re-interpretations and textual tamperings, Joyce's texts thus managed to *live on*… (Ionescu 2014, 193)

The survival of *Ulysses* and inexhaustibility of Joyce's fiction have, time and again, led readers, critics and translators alike to interrogate the very "substance" that the text feasts on in order to live on. Joyce's hailed modernism is, in its turn, the object of theoretical investigations which, in turn, feed an entire industry still stating that "the question of where his modernism sprang from is difficult to answer." (Stewart 2006, 133) While, for some of his contemporaries, Joyce was a Euromodernist by opposition to being "local" (in Ezra Pounds's words: "He writes as a European, not as a provincial", Pound qtd. in Stewart 2006, 134), more recent critical approaches praise his *camouflaged* Irishness as the writer's initial and constant project, and one that still seems open to interpretation and debate:

> […] Joyce was Irish and therefore implicitly pre-modern; yet, he was also European in his own estimation, regarding Ireland as 'an afterthought of Europe' (*SH,* p. 52) and the Irish as the 'most belated race in Europe'. Just as he aimed to make Ireland European, effecting a juncture between medievalism and modernity might be regarded as the chief intellectual task that he set himself in early manhood. (Stewart 2006, 135)

Joyce's professional readers have become less concerned now with underlying the alleged antithetical relationship between his Irishness and his Europeanism/universalism and more inclined towards professing the interdependence of these two dimensions woven together in Joyce's modernity:

> […] Joyce the European and Joyce the Irishman are no more contradictory than Joyce the modern and Joyce the medievalist. What unites all of these is his uniquely perspicacious grasp on the true complexity of the modern world and a corresponding ability to translate it into radically innovative literary fiction. (Stewart 2006, 150)

Irish modernism (the "un-English modernism" in Adrian Frazier's words, 2006, 113) managed to accommodate both and, quite successfully, supplied European modernism some of its main resources: Moore, Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, to name but a few. While Irish modernism has been drawn in the European literary canon and further marketed as such, critics have recently claimed it back for its uniqueness and idiosyncrasies: "Irish Modernism has in truth a good deal in common with that of other European peoples, but it also has

features peculiar to itself." (Kiberd 2006, 33) An illustration in point would be *Ulysses*, the book that celebrates "everyday life" by virtue of its peculiarity of form and style and whose accurate pinpointing remains a problem to this day:

> *Ulysses* is clearly something more than an exfoliation of short stories and many in fact be written in an evolving Irish genre for which as yet there is no name. That genre seems to feed and celebrate the impulse to tell micro-stories, which are partly linked without ever quite being permitted to join in a seamless narrative. (Kiberd 2006, 33)

In the opening page of his massive 2016 study, Mircea Mihăieș firmly states that *Ulysses* is the novel "that never died […] and never will." (Mihăieș 2016, 9). It would be safe to conclude, therefore, by saying that the readers' persistent appetite for such texts is proof that the test of time, as well as that of (cultural, artistic, spatial or ideological) distance, can be justly reclaimed by fiction.

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