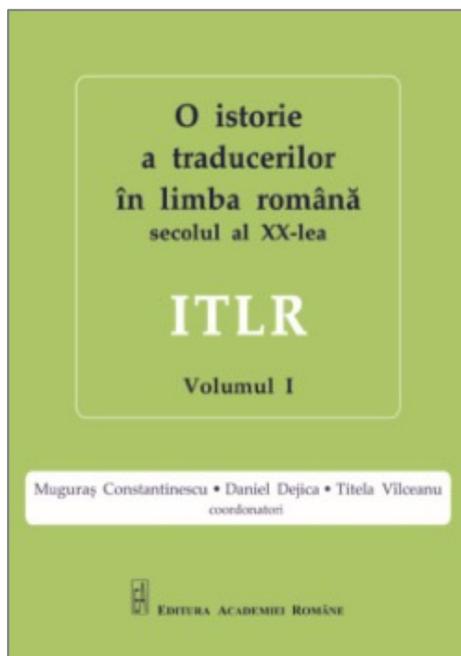


BOOKS

**Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela Vilceanu (eds.),
*O istorie a traducerilor în limba română în secolul al XX-lea (ITLR),
vol. I, București: Editura Academiei Române, 2021, 1445 p.***

The history of translations is comparable to the translator's status. As Muguraș Constantinescu and Rodica Nagy explain (p. 36), histories of numerous sciences and humanities have existed for a while, yet the documenting of translation, and specifically translation into the Romanian language, has been lacking. In a similar manner, one might effortlessly name writers, artists, and scientists, despite not showing interest in any of

these areas, but struggle to name any translator, even though they have benefitted from a translator's work before. In this context, *A History of Translations into the Romanian Language (HTRL)* seeks to resolve these discrepancies and provide an insight into the Romanian translations of the 20th century, with three other volumes completing the project: a second volume for the 20th century, one for the



19th century, and another volume covering the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

This first volume concerning the 20th century is coordinated by Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, and Titela Vilceanu, spanning six chapters of both literary and non-literary translation aspects. Chapter I focuses on context, be it linguistic, literary, historical, geopolitical, social, or cultural, including subjects such as censorship during the

communist regime and literatures of the minorities. The object of Chapter II is the translator's status and condition in Romanian society, ranging from legal aspects concerning translators and interpreters, to cultural institutions which supported translation into the Romanian language, portraits of translators into Romanian, and so on. In Chapter III, the focus shifts to publishers, collections, and

magazines as they shape—and are shaped by—translations. Throughout Chapter IV, different perspectives on translation are explored, the central element being traductology. Chapter V offers an insight into the translation of works belonging to the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in the Romanian cultural landscape of the 20th century. Chapter VI is split into two parts, both of which delve into the translation of poetry. The first part concerns the poetry of numerous cultural spaces, exploring Italian, French, Norwegian, American, Hungarian, Dutch, German, Japanese, Nordic, and Hispanic poetry, as well as contemporary ideas about the translation of poetry, and even the situation of poets who were also translators, such as Lucian Blaga. The second part deals with the translation of poetic discourse and examples of such translators.

Translating French: An Overview

Due to the historical, cultural, and linguistic proximity of Romania and France, the number of contributions regarding works translated from French into Romanian is significant. Beginning with the context, Alina Pelea and Andreea Bugiac present the translation of French literature under communist censorship, offering details about the situation and explaining that many authors could not write as they wished because of the censorship, so they turned to translation—which, unfortunately, was also influenced by the political agenda.

Concerning the cultural institutions which supported translations into Romanian, Mariana Șovea develops the subject by presenting the contributions

of Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, Institut français, and Centre national du livre. Subsequently, she presents several dictionaries and other related works, with regard to the translator's instruments.

As for the translations of medieval French literature into Romanian, Brîndușa Grigoriu illustrates the case of *La chanson de Roland* and that of *Tristan et Iseut*, Liliana Anghel offers a perspective on, Chrétien de Troyes and his translators, and Diana Rinciog investigates the translations of *Le Roman de Renart* and *Le Roman de la Rose* respectively.

Andreea Bugiac explores the case of French poetry from the perspective of translations and retranslations of works created in the previous centuries, completed by Ana-Maria Antonesei's specific contribution on the case of Charles Baudelaire. Andreea Bugiac depicts, once again in an exquisite style, the translation of modern and contemporary French poetry. The last pillar of French literary translations in this volume, Andrei Lazar explores Belgian poetry from a dual perspective, taking into account the predominantly bilingual French-Dutch environment.

The Politics of Translation

While its impact is undeniable, the Francophone space was not the only one to have a major effect on Romanian culture. This volume beautifully showcases the efforts made on the Anglophone side as well. However, just like with French, this effort was not merely cultural, considering the permanent involvement of the political element in translation. As

such, the next part of this review will focus on the ways in which the state involves itself in these matters, using the translation of works from English to Romanian as concrete examples.

To start, in her study, "Translations from English", Silvia Blanca Irimiea looks at the progression of both translation and translator through time, noting the emergence of non-literary translations as well as the influence that the political regime tends to have on these activities. Its ability to bridge different cultures is highlighted as the main reason for the special care that each political regime takes in either encouraging or suppressing translation.

Further, in spite of the regime's tendency to demonise it, the West was not totally inaccessible to the Romanian public during communism. In the study "Translating English Literature under Communist Censorship", Ana-Maria Păcleanu discusses the ways in which this limited interaction with foreign literature took place. In translation, censorship does not remain a simple tool for suppressing dangerous ideas but is also used in order to highlight the merits of the accepted values.

Another perspective is found in the quantitative analysis carried out by Andi Sâsâiac in *Translating the British and American Novel: A Quantitative Approach*, which regards a transitional period in the history of Romanian translations. The study puts to the forefront an explosion in the number of translations that coincides with the advent of consumerism, but also with the propagation of the American dream of freedom in a country still under the shadow of communism's oppression.

Objectively, hard as any individual might try, such a cultural transfer cannot be achieved efficiently without institutional

support. In the biography of *British Council Romania*, Carina Brânzilă highlights the role this institution has played not just in allowing the circulation of ideas and a modicum of interaction between Romanian and British scholars in communist history, but also how much it facilitates cooperation today.

On the individual level, in the study "Leon D. Levițchi. A Guide for Translators from English into Romanian", Luminița-Elena Turcu looks at one of the most prolific translators of the communist era and his work, an articulation of the knowledge he gained throughout his career. The author emphasises the way in which Levițchi's ideas restructured how translation was seen in general, as well as the translator's role in a society closed off to external values.

A further instance of individual action is highlighted by Sanda Berce's use of the example of Virgil Stanciu in her eponymous study to demonstrate how translation allows two completely different societies to be brought closer together. Moreover, translation often ends up making evident some of the similarities between them, despite their distance, be it physical or cultural. Translation becomes both the method to gain new perspectives and a way to share your own with what would otherwise be considered alterity.

Finally, as positive as the cultural interaction facilitated by translation might be, translation itself remains a tool like any other and, as such, if used with less pure intentions, it can have the opposite effect. This is perfectly exemplified in Cătălina Iliescu-Gheorghiu's study "The Romanian Review: Translation as an Instrument of Cultural Propaganda in Communist Romania". The article demonstrates that selective translation and the focus on

the political agenda in the *Romanian Review* led to a limited interest in Romanian authors from Anglophone readers.

The Culture Shock: An Overview of English and Universal Literature Translations into Romanian

Continuing the showcasing of Anglophone literature, the following part of the review aims at presenting the people who made literature accessible to all readers, collapsing language barriers and allowing cultures to intercommunicate and blend. Writers are given a voice and speak a language they might have never known, thanks to the efforts of translators, writers in their own right. Furthermore, this section approaches the eternal dilemma of meaning that is lost in translation, a history of important moments of the translation of English literature for the Romanian public, and shaping one of Romania's most inclusive and impressive collections of world literature.

We start with the "murderous", treacherous, incorrect translations that are the pillars on which today's translated works of the famous author of *The Raven* rest, as Liviu Cotrău shows in "American Poetry—Edgar Allan Poe". The article presents the reception dynamics of Poe's Gothic poems in Romanian literature, highlighting the effort made by Romanian critics and writers to legitimise his prestige among the vastly more popular French authors of the 19th century, as well as to solve the problem of translation itself, which should provide an accurate picture of the emotions, rhythm, and rhyme of the original poems.

Now we arrive at the poems of Irish author W. B. Yeats, who became

known in Romanian culture under rather specific circumstances, heavily influenced by the events that created and shaped the historical backdrop of the time. His poems had been translated, says Rodica Albu in "Case Study: Translating W. B. Yeats", before the end of World War II, after 1965, and at key moments in the author's life such as the acceptance of the Nobel Prize, his death, and the celebration of 100 years since his birth. Furthermore, the article provides an overview of the author's reception in Romanian culture via translations of his works and emphasises the important role of education as well as the historical context for successful cultural transference.

Moving on to one of the most recognizable figures in world literature, according to Dan Nicolae Popescu's study on "William Shakespeare's Sonnets and Their Translation into Romanian—The Canonical Quadrilateral P. Rezuş—I. Frunzetti—N. Chirica—Gh. Tomozei", the reasons why the genius of the English bard has become a landmark in Romanian culture include the "labyrinthine" ingenuity of his writings, their "intrinsic" beauty and complicated structure. However, since all of these features are by definition averse to translation, Popescu claims we should recognise in equal measure both the well-nigh indomitable challenge of conveying Shakespeare's intricate conceits into a language other than English and the all-the-more "praiseworthy" results of the four translators who have endeavoured to acquaint the Romanian readership with his poetic work.

Furthermore, the idea of the importance of translations is raised by Georgiana Dilă in her article "Translating American Poetry—The 20th Century".

Dilă builds an association between that infamous fascination with the freedom and ambition of American culture and the horizons that translations can offer their readers. Translating writers such as Hemmingway, Bukowski, Pound, and many other renowned authors from the "Land of All Possibilities," Georgiana Dilă says, can be a serious challenge, but the outcome should therefore be all the more satisfying.

On a more abstract level, one may come to ask, "What does translating mean?" Adapting not just a language, but an entire culture. Conquering what is not meant to be conquered, what resists being passed on to those who do not understand its nuances. Starting from these assumptions concerning translation as an act of ferrying meaning across cultural and linguistic chasms, Mihaela Gavrilă offers in her article "Translating British Poetry—The 20th Century" an overview of what British literature represents for Romanian culture.

If, metaphorically speaking, translation can be seen as a bridge between two cultures, then anthologies of translations can be seen as highways towards a cross-cultural perspective. Alice Ionescu, in the study "Anthologies of Translations from World Literature", highlights the way in which literary anthologies have contributed to a better understanding of foreign literature by the public and how they have served as starting points in academic research.

Stepping into broader swathes of literature, Orpheus, the mythological character, has crossed over from the realm of Greek lyricism into ours and given his name to an impressive collection of translations from world literature presented by Muguraș Constantinescu and Maria-

Cristina Pîrvu in "The "Orpheus" Collection of World Poetry in Translation". The article covers the impact exerted on Romanian culture by translations of English and French poetic texts authored not just by prominent writers, but also by poets outside the literary canon, all of these resounding as important voices that demand to be heard across cultural barriers.

Finally, having answered what translation means, a new question with a new answer arises. A spokesperson—that is what the translator represents for the reader, because literature, through the cultural ideas and horizons it conveys, belongs to everyone. Guided by this premise, Rodica Lascu-Pop presents in her article "Petre Solomon, Portrait in a Rear-view Mirror" one of the most important Jewish-Romanian translators who, in her words, has "built bridges across cultures."

Throughout the volume, the information is presented in an efficient manner, covering a multitude of topics in the sphere of translations. The structure is clear, and despite the great number of contributors, the skilfully written work maintains its coherence in a language that remains accessible even for the general public, as there is no abuse of jargon. Moreover, despite the initial statement that this history of translations does not seek to be exhaustive (p. 33), it certainly covers a considerable share of the subject. A vast array of aspects come together to trace the evolution of translation into the Romanian language in the 20th century: contexts of all types, the situation of the translator, publishing aspects, traductology topics, the translation of classical and medieval literature, as well as the translation of poetry. Such is the manner

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in which *A History of Translations into the Romanian Language* benefits not only the academic community, but also the general public who may, after reading this

work, finally have an easier time naming translators, and perhaps pay greater attention to the translator's name before beginning their next read.

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