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The (Im)Possibilities of Cultural Translation

Eurofringes. Translating Texts, Translating Cultures / edited by Carmen Duțu. – București:
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The collection *Eurofringes. Translating Texts, Translating Cultures*, edited by Carmen Duțu,¹ was published as a result of the international conference held under the same title between 7th and 9th June, 2019 – *Translating Texts, Translating Cultures* (The fourth edition of the Eurofringes International Conference, facilitated by the Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University in Bucharest, Romania, in collaboration with Gothenburg University, Sweden). In the words of the editor herself, during the conference, in general, “participants from countries belonging to the traditionally considered semi-peripheral or fringe cultures of Europe were invited to approach cultural narratives and texts in their diversity” (Duțu et al. 2021: 12). Therefore, one of the most important intended characteristic of both the conference and the conference proceedings is immediately noticeable: a stronghold in contemporary theoretical approaches of the postmodern provenience such as post-colonialism, through the insistence on the so-called *fringe* or *semi-peripheral* cultures of Europe. This determines the selection of the authors and, partially, the character of the papers represented, whereby one should understand “the conceptual framework of *fringe* as both a geographical category – when employed as *Euro-fringe* [...], and as a counterculture, non-normative concept” (Duțu et al. 2021: 13).

In addition, from the concise but comprehensive and informative preface, the reader gets the opportunity to learn about the main trends in (contemporary) translation studies, a field which began to acquire its status as a discipline mid-20th century – especially with the so-called *cultural turn* that, towards the end of the 20th century, changed the dominant linguistic-formalist paradigm in the same studies – as well as with the scientific hypotheses on which this collection itself is based. Namely, at the centre of editorial attention are the various inseparable relations between translation and culture, that is, translation as, broadly understood, *cross-cultural communication*, and vice versa: *communication as translation*:

Throughout the volume, the reader is invited to explore the very dynamics between translation and culture which has been regarded not only as re-construction, encounter, and negotiation of texts but also as a means of re-interpreting the world, from multiple perspectives (Duțu et al. 2021: 12).

This, above all, includes fictional works and the recognition of the mediating role of both translators and translation in the transfer and interpretations of different artistic models/media as well as ideas from one culture to another, with special reference to culturally specific codes and their translation treatment and reception status. Accordingly, this publication represents a valuable contribution to the established, dynamic and polyphonic field of translation studies at the global level, engaging in current debates on key concepts and approaches *beyond language* which, as the editor claims, “have made Translation Studies a rather privileged field in academia in the past decades” (Duțu et al. 2021: 9) – cross-culturalism, *invisibility of translators*, *foreignization/domestication*, to mention only a few of them.

The editor, however, adds: “aiming to give birth to a new methodological approach to translating culture, rather than texts as units, scholars in Cultural Studies have started shaping up a connected phenomenon called Cultural Translation” (Duțu et al. 2021: 11). These aspirations resulted in the danger of omitting “the text as unit” itself, i.e. its close reading. Aware of this, the editor of the collection insists on papers which try to reconcile more traditional philological approaches to reading and interpretation with current tendencies in cultural studies and translation studies, to a greater or lesser extent. In other words, the volume is characterized by the pronounced interdisciplinarity and eclecticism that these disciplines necessarily require and imply, but mainly starting from materials or samples that are accessed *from within*: the broadly understood *texts* (phenomena) are not only situated in the cultural context of production, *translation* and reception, but are also meant, when appropriate, to be evaluated and examined as relatively autonomous instances (of a fictional nature).

Structurally, the volume is divided into three chapters: “Language. Cultural Coding and Decoding”, “Cultural Translation – (Her)story” and “Intersemiotic Translations”. Just as the title itself and the editorial concept suggest, neither the formal organization nor the content of the volume are overly specified, strictly defined or noticeably cohesive. The decision to avoid the classification of the papers into the chapters, for instance, would not affect the conception and reception of the collection to any extent. Individual papers from different units, moreover, correspond to each other in suggestive ways: the introductory and the final one, above all. In addition, methodological hypotheses and interpretive strategies fluctuate throughout the

collection on very dispersive and wide grounds. Even if it is seen as a consequence of the (inter)disciplinary requirements themselves, the editor's hope that "eclectic quality will be felt as an advantage by the reader" (Duğu et al. 2021: 17), although not unfounded, can also be characterized as somewhat risky, if we consider the publication *as a whole*. Rather, it seems that certain scientific articles in the collection, thanks to their quality and specific focuses, can be more or less relevant and help in other close studies conducted in a similar (narrow) domain. Consequently, it is more plausible for a reviewer to focus on some of the individual contributions and their advantages and disadvantages than to the general ideas and approaches represented in the collection.

For instance, the introductory paper by Emrah Eriş – "English and Turkish Translations of Camus' *The Stranger*: Treason or Not?" – starts with the assumption that "differences between cultures cause many more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Eriş 2021a: 27), while it is concluded that "one of the crucial parameters that have to be taken into account by translators in translating literary works is to take care of cultural differences part from the intention of the author and addressee of the source text" (Eriş 2021a: 37). A careful textual-cultural analysis shows that the selected Turkish translation of Camus' classic is far closer to the original than the selected English counterpart, but also effectively points to the repercussions these differences have for the interpretation both of the text of the novel itself and the French existentialism in general.

Just as the last paper in the collection, written by the same author – "Cultural, Social, and Psychological Implications of Subtitles of the Movie *Winter Sleep*" – the first one figures as a comparative case study on the challenges and (im)possibilities of cross-cultural translation of a certain fictional text, in the tension between the East and the West, the semi-periphery and the centre of Europe. However, in another case, the focus of attention is on another medium as well – the now cult movie *Winter Sleep* by the Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan; more precisely, its translations into English and French. A very interesting case study was chosen: the protagonist is a Turk, "an intellectual who seems to be closer to the West in terms of lifestyle and perspective", as a result of which *Winter Sleep* "contains ironic messages and metaphors that exist throughout the movie" (Eriş 2021b: 167). Nevertheless, it seems that this inspiring starting point of analysis could have been more elaborated, either thanks to a more interdisciplinary (co-authored) approach or a more in-depth interpretation of the movie. In other words, focusing on the text in the strict sense, i.e. on the movie script, its translation and mechanisms of its cultural (de)coding, the paper mostly neglects the other, visual and technical

aspects of the movie. In this sense, it functions as a micro-interpretive and necessarily limited, but still valuable, contribution to the *Winter Sleep* phenomenon as a whole.

The second chapter, “Cultural Translation – (Her)story”, is marked by a feminist research perspective, that is, an analytical appreciation of the category of gender. Among others, it contains a very thorough, innovative and ambitious paper, entitled “Is This a Man’s World? Hajduk Heroines, from Eighteenth-Century Ballads to Nineteenth-Century Romanian Fiction”. It focuses on “the evolution from gender stereotypes to genre convention by comparing a collection of eighteenth-century hajduk folklore with a corpus of nineteenth century Romanian hajduk fiction” (Patraş 2021: 84). Author Roxana Patraş convincingly points out the importance of the “wider process of *erotization* that practically reshapes the eighteenth-century hajduk folklore (as well as its enlightened political claims) and makes it a perfect resource for the nineteenth-century sensationalist fiction” (Patraş 2021: 90). This is a rare case in the collection as a whole that the research, at least partially, addresses the Balkans and, more subtly, the so-called theories on *Balkanization*. Accordingly, this paper could be of utmost importance for researchers in the field of Slavic Studies.

Furthermore, in an equally interesting, well-elaborated paper “Translating the Double in English Literature from the Gothic to Contemporary Entanglements of Hunter and Hunted”, by Gillian M. E. Alban, attention is paid to the transposition of the motif of double from certain literary works by male authors into the works by female authors – Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, A. S. Byatt, and Margaret Atwood. By itself, it seems that the article does not deserve any significant objections. However, considering the entire context of the collection, two potential problems become apparent: on the one hand, the prominent Western-centricity of the selection, and on the other hand, as in the case of the previous paper, an extremely broad understanding of “cultural translation”. The very same remarks could be made in the case of paper entitled “The Proto-Cyborg in Dadaists’ Syncretic Performances”, by Felix Nicolau, from the third chapter of this volume.

Besides, *Eurofringes. Translating Texts, Translating Cultures* contains two more papers. The first one is written by Alenka Jensterle-Doležal and its title is “The Shift to Modernity. Czech Motives in the Literary Works of Slovene-Croat Author Zofka Kveder”. This paper represents a valuable and systematic contribution to the biographical and bibliographic reconstruction of the activities of the prominent woman author from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Zofka Kveder (Jelovšek, Demetrović), or, more broadly, to the history of feminism and women’s history outside the Western sphere. The selection is additionally understandable since Zofka herself was multilingual, as well as both an active translator and

one of the most translated South-Slavic modernist authors. However, although adequately situated in the editorial concept of the collection (maybe even more adequately than the remaining papers in the same chapter), this paper requires certain remarks. Above all, the striking absence of certain aspects of the intellectual and literary portrait of Zofka Kveder is disputed. Although the focus is undoubtedly on her “most productive period”, the Prague years (Jensterle-Doležal 2021: 70), and cross-cultural communication between Slovenia and the Czech lands (as well as, to a lesser extent, Croatia), the earlier part of Zofka’s genesis is nevertheless addressed. On the other side, the author of the paper hardly mentions the last part, which followed the First World War and the Yugoslav unification, of which Zofka Kveder Demetrović was one of the most ardent and influential proponents among the (women) intellectuals of her era. Namely, she was not only a “typical Habsburg intellectual” (Jensterle-Doležal 2021: 79), but also a typical (early) Yugoslav intellectual (see, for instance, Badurina 2010; Mihurko Poniž 2019; Свирчев 2015, 2020; Симић 2022). Consequently – from the retrospective of Zofka Kveder’s numerous creative and cultural endeavours – her fruitful editorial and authorial engagement before the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, and the significant ideological and poetic modifications that emerged in her oeuvre and agenda in the last years before her death, are missing. As a result, this represents a missed opportunity to further problematize and stratify the “fringes of Europe”, i.e. to introduce the problem of the Balkans and Balkans’ history where and how it is relevant.

Finally, the paper “Recent Trends in Bessarabian Prose: Three Authors and Two Origins”, although it is formally part of the first chapter, also concerns a feminist approach to literature, since its author, Tatiana Ciocoi, takes into consideration the differences in the production and reception of men’s and women’s (contemporary) Bessarabian fiction, the one which is created “within a highly intricate context: that of the Romanian culture in the Republic of Moldova, a former Soviet republic” (Duțu et al. 2021: 13). With this choice of topic, the author clearly and successfully attributes to the conceptual framework of the publication, offering a brief critical-interpretive review of a marginalized literary field which is – it is reasonable to assume – almost unknown to the wide and heterogeneous target audience of the collection. Her contribution, although it contains certain methodological vagueness or inconsistencies, is valuable inasmuch as it functions as a case study that would further be worth deepening – above all through comparison with other similarly positioned literary fields and phenomena.

To conclude, the collection *Eurofringes. Translating Texts, Translating Cultures* is undoubtedly an “ambitious”, “eclectic” (Duțu et al. 2021: 17) and valuable contribution to

contemporary cultural studies, translation studies, studies of literature, anthropology, linguistics, (intellectual) history and related humanistic disciplines. It is significant that it appears in Romania, a country which is not dominantly perceived as *central* through the Western-centric prism; accordingly, the same can be concluded when it comes to the selection of certain thematic units as well as represented authors, whether they come from Turkey, the Czech Republic or Romania. In addition, the insistence on feminist, post-colonial or related research positions further justifies the editorial concept of the collection. However, one gets the impression that, on this occasion, an opportunity was missed to highlight other (even more peripheral) cultures and the problems of their *cultural translation*, as well as to place the research in a more comparative and somewhat more inclusive framework. Despite this, i.e. sporadic Western-centric choices or approaches, this collection is marked by a scientific relevance that can be helpful and influential in other contemporary attempts to decentralize, pluralize and problematize the European (academic) field in detail. It consists of research papers which have the potential to become an important reference point for those efforts, as well as a stimulus for further consideration of *cross-cultural communication as translation* and *translation as cross-cultural communication* out(side) of the Western-centric context.

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