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BRINGING MOLDOVAN NOVELS TO QUEBEC – POSSIBILITY OR UTOPIA?

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Abstract

Sherry Simon, an associate professor at Concordia University, compiled a book of essays written by translators about translation and translatability. My considering bringing Ion Druță's works to Quebec has coincided with the time Sherry's book was a must-read for a paper. I answered some of my questions through those translators' opinions about literary translation, and their "methodology" of approaching Druță's works will hopefully help anyone courageous enough to translate Druță into French or English in Canada.

Keywords: *novel, translation, translatability, literary translation, approach*

Rezumat

Sherry Simon, conferențiar la Universitatea Concordia, a întocmit o culegere de eseuri scrise de traducători despre traducere și traductibilitatea textelor. Intenția mea de a-l face cunoscut pe Ion Druță în Québec, prin traduceri, a coincis în timp cu apariția acestei lucrări. În continuare, vă propun unele meditații personale atât asupra lucrării în cauză, cât și asupra «metodologiei» de traducere a lui Druță în franceză sau engleză.

Cuvinte-cheie: *roman, traducere, traductibilitate, traducerea literară, perspectivă*

My love for the French and English languages began in my teenage years, when I was listening to my teachers at school talking fluently and so beautifully. Later at university, I studied both languages assiduously and four years later, I acknowledged that I was quadrilingual and full of projects, translation and interpretation being some of them. In Moldova, I taught languages, and translation and interpretation work was scarce but very challenging. I then concluded what a great command of both the source and target languages I should have to actually have my brain switch in seconds from one language to the other. And I didn't like it as much as translation, during the process of which one has the time to look up a word in as many dictionaries as one has. Coming to Canada was actually a *carte blanche* for my translation plans, and Concordia University attracted me with the programs it offers. This essay will be an attempt to answer some of my questions about Druță's works translatability.

Last fall, I was reading some essays on Translation Studies, and Venuti's foreignization and domestication were new and fascinating ideas to me³³⁸. I swallowed all those ideas about translation that Benjamin Walter, Andre Lefevere provided with me concepts like target-oriented and source-oriented translation, cultural importance in translation, and so on³³⁹. Reading Beverly Mitchell's article "Cultural Studies and Literary Translation" I came across three questions that made me stop to think about a Moldovan novelist and his works, known all over ex-USSR, Ion Druță "How meaningful is the original text if it can be transformed into a new cultural situation without being disfigured? Is there so little in the original text that depends on its own cultural situation? Can the meaning of any text exist outside of culture?"³⁴⁰ These questions generated other ones in my mind. Ion Druță, a prolific writer who has created around 60 plays, novels and essays, and who wrote for and about Moldovan people of the Soviet period, could his novels be brought to Quebec culture? Could his novels be translated and if yes, how well would the translator be able to render the cultural differences? I set my mind to bringing this writer's works to Montreal, and the translation essays edited by Sherry Simon in the book "Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec"³⁴¹ gave me some leads to how I should translate the

³³⁸Venuti, 1995.

³³⁹Benjamin, 1968; Lefevere, 1992.

³⁴⁰Mitchell, 1998.

³⁴¹Simon, 1995.

Moldovan novelist Ion Druță in Quebec. Besides getting very different perspectives on the translation process in general, reading those excellent translators' ideas and conclusions will help me eventually bring Druță to the Quebecois context.

Actually, when I read the book I was continuously thinking about my plan to translate Druță's novels in English here. How could I not? It is true that Canadian translation occurs mainly from French into English and English into French. Other languages are very much present in Canada but they are not translated. Wayne Grady raises the question of other languages to be translated in the Canadian context when he speaks about the Norwegian Association of Literary Translators compared to its version in Canada³⁴². I strongly agree with the idea that the multicultural facet Canada benefits from will only strengthen through translation. The Canadian translation industry will only gain from bringing Italian, Russian, Algerian, Libanese and Moldovan works to the Canadian readers.

Jane Brierley, in the context of translating a historical novel, asks a question I have also asked myself not once: "How could I do this if I were influenced, either for good or for ill, by my predecessors?"³⁴³ Indeed, knowing that someone translated the novel I am about to begin working on is very tempting because I can be easily lured by that translator's choice of tone, vocabulary, rhythm. Many of Druță's works have been translated into the main languages spoken in the ex-USSR, and only few of them (Samariteanca, Moldavian Autumn) have been translated into English in 1994 in the USA. At first, I wanted to find that 15-year-old translation and read it, but Brierley's essay made me change my mind. I think I will do my own translation first and then, I will do a comparative study of the past translations.

Each translator is a writer as well, as David Homel states in his beautifully crafted essay on tinfuting³⁴⁴. However, I disagree with him when he claims that "outwriting the work, outdoing it, being better than the original... [this is] the duty of all translators." Translation is rendering another person's work into another language, with respect to the source and target languages. If I outdo the work, I practically create another one, and not present to my audience the text already created. Is this the aim of translation? In this case, translation is a means of becoming a better writer, and I don't think this is fair with regard to the source text. David Homel is a writer himself, so Sheila Fischman is right when she says in her interview that "affinities with the source text are significant in the case of a writer translating a writer"³⁴⁵. I am not a writer even if I like writing — this is why I want to be a translator maybe! To me, translation is more of an entering into a certain writer/poet/essayist/playwright's world and exploring it, attempting to decipher the images and metaphors created, bringing the work the person has put so much effort into into another language. I completely agree with Fischman again when she says that she feels "tremendous respect for the writer." Knowing "how he sweats and bleeds over every fragment of a sentence... encourages me to strive and strive again to come up with something that reflects what he has done." Ion Druță has been a beloved writer of mine since school time, and he was read by almost everyone. We read his novels as part of the school curriculum; my mother was reading "Biserica Albă" ("The White Church") when I was little—I remember her, with the book on her lap on a summer Saturday night before putting us to bed. The tremendous respect mentioned above is what I feel when I read sentence after sentence Druță's works. And all I want is to "english" his novels, not to anglicize them, as Philip Stratford stated wonderfully in his essay on *stratfordizing* Antonine Maillet' *mailletois* French³⁴⁶. "On the one hand, respect the integrity of the author's text, and on the other hand, be true to your own idiom." There is a fifty-fifty attitude in Stratford's words and I go along with his view of translation completely. I think the simile he is making in his essay will be my virtual slogan when setting to translate a book: "The task of the translator is to adjust the gait, *le rythme de sa démarche*, to match the gait of the other writer"³⁴⁷.

Stratford mentions in his essay having the chance to go to Acadie, the place Maillet wrote from. Normally, a translator would be happy to have the chance to go to the place where his/her source

³⁴²Grady, 1995, p. 47//Simon, 1995.

³⁴³Brierley, 1995, p. 163.

³⁴⁴ Homel, 1995, p. 85.

³⁴⁵Fischman, 1995, p. 148.

³⁴⁶Stratford, 1995, p. 93.

³⁴⁷Stratford worked on Antonine Maillet's novels, written in the Acadian dialect, a very colourful and sharp Canadian dialect.

text was created. But no... "Translation depends on intimate identification with one's author, yet it depends absolutely on distance and difference too." So true! I think if I translated Druță's works in Moldova, the result would have been worse than my translating him here, and the reason is the distance that Stratford is talking about. Me being here can cause me to see his works differently, sure, but I think and hope that after three years of distance from Moldova, the problems reflected in Druță's works will be better – that is more objectively – rendered in Montreal.

In Esther Allen's report on the international situation of literary translation, "To Be Translated or Not to Be"³⁴⁸, Bowker, a primary collector of statistics on the publishing industry in the USA, stated that "the English-speaking countries remain relatively inhospitable to translations into English from other languages." This is a situation that I would strongly want changed in the nearest future, with benefits for both the source cultures and the huge lingua franca target language—English. The Center for Book Culture gives statistics of the translated into English fiction published in the USA³⁴⁹. Moldova is not on the list. And it should be. And Ion Druță's works are the first on the list for import to Canada and its readers.

Conclusions

1. While translating Druță's novels, the translator has to choose whether to foreignize or domesticise his work. Producing a target-language oriented translation or a source-language oriented one is completely the task of the translator.
2. Reading previous translations of the same work is not desirable since the trace of that translator's choice of vocabulary, register and tone could influence the present translation.
3. It is again the translator's choice to either outdo the work to make it more appealing for the target audience, or just "English" it, rendering a foreign cultural reality into the new one.

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³⁴⁸Allen, 2008.

³⁴⁹*ibidem*.