A N OVERVIEW OF THE SCANDINAVIAN POETRY TRANSLATED IN ROMANIAN CULTURE

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Abstract:

In this paper we shall focus on the impact of Scandinavian literature in Romanian culture. The area of interest is poetry in a general context as it was perceived in Europe and especially in Romania. The period under analysis is 1848-1941. The paper is structured as follows: the initial part aims at an overview of the evolution of the Norwegian poems along the centuries. The second part of the paper presents an interview by Florin Dan Prodan in the magazine called „Mixul de cultură” (“Culture mix”), where the Norwegian poet Øystein Hauge talks about the relationship between European and Norwegian culture. The third part encompasses an overview upon Scandinavian poetry translated in Romania. Moreover, the Norwegian poets, Knut Hamsun, Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen, Rolf Jacobsen and Sigbjørn Obstfelder, have attracted the attention of the Romanian translators. In addition, we shall present also an article about Sigbjørn Obstfelder – „Un poet original: Sigbjørn Obstfelder” (“An original poet: Sigbjørn Obstfelder”) – written by Romanescu Marcel in „Flamura” magazine. Swedish and Danish poems were also translated in the Romanian anthology „Poezie nordică modernă”. In the last part of the paper there are presented a few Romanian translators such as Veronica Porumbacu, Tașcu Gheorghiu and others who have contributed at creating an intercultural bridge.

Rezumat:

În această lucrare ne vom îndrepta atenția asupra impactului literaturii scandinave în literatura română. Zona de interes o constituie poezia în context general așa cum a fost ea percepută în Europa și în special în România. Perioada supusă analizei este 1848-1941. Lucrarea este structurată astfel: prima parte are ca scop prezentarea generală a evoluției poeziei norvegiene de-a lungul secolelor. Cea de-a doua parte prezintă un interviu cu Florin Dan Prodan în revista numită „Mixul de cultură”, în care poetul norvegian Øystein Hauge pune în discuție relația dintre culturile europene și norvegiene. A treia parte cuprinde o prezentare generală a poeziei scandinave tradusă în România. În plus, poeții norvegieni Knut Hamsun, Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen, Rolf Jacobsen și Sigbjørn Obstfelder, au atras atenția traducătorilor români. Mai mult decât atât, vom prezenta, de asemenea, un articol despre Sigbjørn Obstfelder – „Un poet original: Sigbjørn Obstfelder” (“An original poet: Sigbjørn Obstfelder”) – scris de Marcel Romanescu în revista „Flamura”. În antologia de „Poezie nordică modernă”, au fost traduse în limba română și poezii suedeze și daneze. În ultima parte a lucrării sunt prezentați o serie de traducători români ca de exemplu, Veronica Porumbacu, Tașcu Gheorghiu și alți câțiva care au contribuit la crearea unei legături interculturale.

Keywords: translation, translator, Scandinavian poetry, Sigbjørn Obstfelder, Nordic modern poetry, European culture, Norwegian culture

The Norwegian poetry along the centuries

“What can I say about Poetry? What can I tell you about these clouds, about this sky? ... Look, look at it, look at it, and nothing more. You will understand that a poet cannot say anything about Poetry. Let’s leave this in critics and teachers’ charge. Neither you, and I and a poet knows what the Poem is.”¹ [our translation]. These words belong to the most popular and influent Spanish writer of the 20th century, namely Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), who tried to present in brief this theory regarding Ars Poetica. He thought that a poet could not give the definition of poetry and he could not explain what his poems were about. This is because each artist has his inner thoughts that cannot be explained through words or phrases. He continued with the idea that the poem: “It is here, look at it. Its fire burns in

¹ „Dar ce pot să-ți spun eu despre Poezie? Ce pot să-ți spun despre norii aceștia, despre cerul acesta? ... Privește, privește-l, privește-l, și nimic mai mult. Vei înțelege că un poet nu poate spune nimic despre Poezie. Să rămână asta în seama criticilor și profesorilor. Dar nici tu, nici eu și nici un poet nu știe ce este Poezia”. Federico García Lorca, “Ars Poetica,” *Revista de literatură universală* 6 (1966): 4.

my hands. I understand it and I can work with it perfectly, but I cannot speak about it without doing literature. [...] In my conferences, sometimes I spoke about Poetry, but the only thing that I cannot talk about is my poem.”² The writer presented explicitly that he could talk about his own creation, because he found this an almost impossible issue.

Poetry has always been a way through which writers create their own universe expressing their own feelings and experiences. When dealing with poetry the focus is set on words, rhyme, structure and topic.

Poetry in Norway (Dikt i Norge) is a very complex book that encompasses a brief history of the Norwegian poetry beginning with the years 200 until 2000. The book begins with a short fable that presents briefly the well-known scene from the Bible when Adam and Eve were driven away from Paradise. There is a suggestive description of the two people who are completely changed since their driving away from Eden.

“They needed to breathe and the pulse was quickening, but their steps through the broken stones became slower. Eve regretted so much that she let herself tempted by the snake. Adam longed for the lost innocence”³ [our translation]. It is visible the primordial peace and tranquillity were ruined by the avidity of the two people. They were not satisfied with the goods received from God. On the contrary, they ate from the forbidden tree, being tempted by the Evil One. Up to now this fable seems to have nothing in common with poetry and poems in general, but the last part of it elucidates the present situation. Thus, “the short-tempered pulse, the shallow breath, the slow steps through the broken stones arrange the language such as to express the tempo and Eve’s meditations, Adam’s longing floating as feelings, thoughts and desires. Thus, they talked to each other. Their first child, The Poem, was born”⁴ [our translation]. In this

² „E aici, uite-o. Focul ei arde în mâinile mele. Eu îl înțeleg, și lucrez cu el perfect, dar nu pot vorbi despre el fără să fac literatură. [...] În conferințele mele am vorbit uneori despre Poezie, dar singurul lucru despre care nu pot vorbi e poezia mea”. *Ibid.*

³ “De hev etter pusten, og pulsen gikk høy, men skrittene deres i grusen ble langsommere. Eva angret forferdelig på at hun latt seg friste av slangen. Adam lengtet tilbake til uskylden som var tapt”. Ivar Havnevik, *Dikt i Norge – Lyrikkhistorie 200-2000* (Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S, 2002), 10.

⁴ “Den hissige pulsen, den korte pusten, de langsomme skrittene i grusen fikk språket til å ordne seg i rytmiske takter, og Evas meditasjoner, Adams lengsel, fløt sammen som følelse og tanke og begær. Så talte de til hverandre. Deres første barn, Diktet, var født”. *Ibid.*

quotation there is one thing that is strengthened and that is the rhythm of the spoken language. It can be understood both as noise and as pulse. All in all, there is a strong relation between the surrounding world and the inner feelings of the two biblical figures and the emphasis is set both on how rhythmical a poem can be and on the musicality of the spoken language. Because only after Adam and Eve talked to each other, only then was the Poem born.

The Scandinavian poetry dates from the Middle Ages when popular ballads and improvised poems were written for different occasions and celebrations. Moreover, the so-called skaldic poems were representative of the regions from the North of Europe, being kept from changing or loss in sagas about kings and rulers both from Norway and from the other countries from Scandinavia. Those who used poetry for becoming cultivated persons were the men of God or the priests. With their help a new category of poems was developed, such as religious poems. Besides that, the poetry had a prominent role at the beginning of the 20th century when the well-known Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), one of the “The Four Great” Norwegian writers, together with Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Jonas Lie (1833-1908) and Alexander Kielland (1849-1906), was a Nobel Prize Laureate. Bjørnson is also the author of the poem entitled *Yes, We Love This Land* (*Ja, vi elsker dette landet*). This literary work became the National Anthem of Norway on the 17th of May 1864, in Oslo (Christiania).

The symbolist writer Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866-1900) was considered towards the end of the 19th century as one of the greatest innovators of Norway in matter of poetry. As well as Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994), who made his debut in the literary world with the volume of poems entitled *Earth and Iron* (*Jord og jern*), he was translated into numerous languages, including Romanian. For example, the Romanian poet Marcel Romanescu (1897-1956) wrote an article about the Norwegian writer Sigbjørn Obstfelder. It was published in 1926 in *Flamura*, a Romanian literary magazine, about which we shall discuss later in our paper.

Olav H. Hauge (1908-1994), Paal-Helge Haugen (b. 1945), Eldrid Lunden (b. 1940) and some other Norwegian poets were representative figures through their topics and their writing style. On the contrary, the 1960s were representative of their modernist and experimental poetry, followed by the 1970s and the 1980s which gave birth to a new type of poetry that combines the political issues with the social and aesthetic ones.

Finally, there is another type of poetry, namely the contemporary poems that show a great fascination towards reality. These poets wanted to illustrate through their works that not only the philosophical and romantic feelings can be expressed but also the concrete, simple and sometimes ordinary and unimportant things. Jan Erik Vold (b. 1939) is a contemporary poet who creates this type of poems. His volume of poetry entitled *Mor Godhjertas glade versjon. Ja* is a collection of poems that illustrate very well this new type that characterizes today's poetry.

In what follows, we will focus on Norwegian poetry and its translation in the Romanian culture. Firstly, we present an interview with the Norwegian poet Øystein Hauge, taken by the Romanian poet Florin Dan Prodan.

An interview with the Norwegian poet Øystein Hauge

According to the Norwegian writer Øystein Hauge (b. 1956), a cultural relation was created among the European countries, especially between East and West. "I see these openings especially in a literary context – but also from the perspective of various European projects I have attended within the last years [...] There is a great interest – the invitations of the cultural organizations both in East and in West – that made possible to reach this reciprocity"⁵ [our translation]. As far as Norway is concerned, there are two cultural organizations of major importance, NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad) and NFI (The Norwegian Film Institute).

When the focus is set on the contemporary poetry, Hauge says that: "the fairy-tales were the essential and the vital part of the so-called Norwegian folk literature that united our people. But I have to be fair and say that the poem from the beginning of the 19th century had a very important role in 'the birth of the Norwegian nation'."⁶ [our translation]. Here he makes reference to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Sigbjørn Obstfelder,

⁵ „Eu văd aceste deschideri în special în context literar – dar și din perspectiva diverselor proiecte europene la care am participat în ultimii ani [...] Există un mare interes – invitațiile organizațiilor culturale atât din est cât și din vest – care a făcut posibil să ajungem la această reciprocitate” Florin Dan Prodan, „Interviu cu poetul norvegian Øystein Hauge,” *Mixul de cultură* (2009), <http://www.cristinaandries.ro/pagini/mixu/?p=3937>, accessed March 25, 2013.

⁶ „basmele au fost partea esențială, vitală a așa-numitei literaturi populare norvegiene, care a unit poporul nostru. Dar să fiu corect și să spun că, de fapt, poezia de la începutul secolului 19 a jucat un rol important în 'nașterea națiunii norvegiene'.” *Ibid.*

to figures that have been already mentioned in our paper. Moreover, Øystein Hauge presents some of his volumes of poetry namely: *Green (Grønt)* (2000), a volume of haiku poems of a real success according to the critics' assessment, *Only (Bare)* (2002), *Radio Poems (Radiodikt)* (2003) and *Photography with a dancing couple (Fotografi om to som dansar)* (2005) are another three volumes of poems that were appreciated by readers. Through this interview the Norwegian poet wanted to emphasize the idea that throughout the years many Scandinavian writers embraced the *haiku* style using it in their literary works. These traditional Japanese poems use two important elements: man and nature. In the interview, Øystein Hauge concludes in this way: "The forms of the poem must have the ability to evolve and not to stagnate and then become archaic. The *haiku* poem showed that this form-text has special capacities"⁷ [our translation].

Besides the Norwegian poet Øystein Hauge, we shall focus our attention on other Norwegian writers such as: Knut Hamsun (1859-1952), a prominent figure of the Norwegian literature who had an important role in the modernization of the European novel with his famous work *Hunger (Sult)* (1890). Among the symbolist poets we can mention Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen (1915-1985) who was inspired by the famous sculpture *Bird in Space*. Thus, she wrote a poem entitled *Brancusi's Bird – a Romanian Sculpture (Brancusi-fuglen - en rumensk skulptur)*. These two Norwegian poets together with Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994), Astrid Tollefsen (1897-1973), Inger Hagerup (1905-1985), Gunvor Hofmo (1921-1995), Paal Brekke (1923-1993) and others were translated by three Romanian translators, Veronica Porumbacu (1921-1977), Tașcu Gheorghiu (1910-1981) and Petre Stoica (1931-2009). They gathered the Romanian translations of the Scandinavian poems in a two-volume anthology that has the title *Modern Nordic Poetry (Poezie nordică modernă)* (1968). In our paper, the focus will be set on the second volume that refers to Norway and Sweden, but we will also make references to the first volume that includes Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

In the second volume of the Romanian anthology there are 35 Norwegian and Swedish writers translated into Romanian. Concerning the first volume there are 30 Danish writers each having two poems translated into Romanian. As for the Icelandic and Finnish poets there is a reduced

⁷ „Formele poeziei trebuie să aibă abilitatea de a evolua și nu de a stagna apoi deveni arhaice. Poemul haiku asta a arătat: că această formă-text are aceste capacități speciale.” *Ibid.*

percentage.

Norwegian poems translated into Romanian

The Romanian anthology begins with the prominent writer and poet Knut Hamsun, namely with two poems *Island in Archipelago* (*Skærgårdø – Insulă în arhipelag*) and *The Song of the Red Roses* (*Med røde roser – Cântecul trandafirilor roșii*), both translated by Veronica Porumbacu. The latter is one of the poems taken from his single volume of poetry *The Wild Choir* (*Det vilde Kor – Corul sălbatic*) first published in 1904. This literary work is a very complex one, when dealing with its contents. For example, there are both deep feelings of desperation, anger and feelings of happiness and joy, resulting from the entire volume of poetry. The poet belongs to the literary movement called expressionism, being also, as we mentioned before, the promoter of the modernist movement in Norway. With a view to the poem *Island in Archipelago* (*Skærgårdø – Insulă în arhipelag*), it illustrates the features of this expressionist movement.

In the article „Un poet original: Sigbjørn Obstfelder” (“An Original Poet: Sigbjørn Obstfelder”), published in 1916 in *Flamura*, a Romanian cultural magazine, the Romanian writer and translator Marcel Romanescu (1897 – 1956) who was, in fact the author of this article, presents some useful features both of the Norwegian poetry in general, and of Sigbjørn Obstfelder’s literary work, in particular. Thus, he states the following: “The young writers left back the theories, making their way towards living things; [...] the life was welcomed with a new hope, with a living fear. [...] It was an almost religious enthusiasm, a progress towards poetry, [...]. It is the period of the 1890s, the epoch of the Renaissance of Norwegian poetry”⁸ [our translation]. The present article plays an important role in the Romanian literary life because it emphasizes a very special Norwegian poet, namely Sigbjørn Obstfelder. Marcel Romanescu underlines the idea that: “A struggling existence rarely explained better a new literary movement. [...] The six little books that form his entire literary work, [...], they are worth known by those who, in art, are looking for the uncommon and the original

⁸ „Scriitorii tineri părăsiseră teoriile, îndreptându-se către fapte trăite; [...] viața era întâmpinată cu nădejde nouă, cu teamă vie. Era, în aceasta, un avânt aproape religios, un avânt spre poezie, [...]. E epoca dela 1890, epoca renașterii lirice norvegiene”. Marcel Romanescu, „Un poet original: Sigbjørn Obstfelder,” *Flamura literară, artistică și socială* 4-5 (1926): 106.

personality”⁹ [our translation]. The Romanian translator uses noble words when he describes the personality of the Norwegian writer: “Mild and modest, unassuming, Obstfelder built his own life with a childish uncertainty”¹⁰ [our translation]. In addition, the Romanian translator points out a few special features of Sigbjørn Obstfelder’s literary work: “[...] Obstfelder finds out what boundlessness means through the gold dust that sparks in the sun; in every breath; in everything he wrote, he struggled with philosophy issues. Poetry and art were for him the proclamation of the greatest ideals [...]”¹¹ [our translation]. Moreover, Marcel Romanescu states that there are two important figures that appear in the poems of the Norwegian poet: the world and the man, two opposing entities. The man tries hard to create his own universe far from the chaotic world that surrounds him, and that is the cosmic infinite or the “home of the stars”¹² [our translation] as the poet wrote in his poem *I see* (*Jeg ser – Må uit*). In Marcel Romanescu’s article there are three poems translated into Romanian: *I see* (*Jeg ser – Må uit*), *Friends* (*Venner – Prietenii*) and *Nameless* (*Navnløs – Fără nume*). Moreover, the Romanian translator not only translated the poems from Norwegian into Romanian but also analyzed them in detail. Besides these poems he also refers to some fiction such as: *The Cross* (*Korset – Crucea*), *The Red Droplets* (*Den røde dråber – Picăturile roșii*), *Two Novelettes* (*To novelleter – Două nuvele*) and *A Priest’s Diary* (*En præsts dagbog – Însemnările unui preot*). In his analysis, Marcel Romanescu compares Sigbjørn Obstfelder with the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s writing styles: “You feel the same pity for human sufferings that burned inside Dostoyevsky’s heart”¹³ [our translation].

Coming back to the Romanian anthology of *Modern Nordic Poetry* (*Poezie nordică modernă*), the Norwegian writer Rolf Jacobsen is represented by poems such as *Europe* (*Europa- Europa*), *Towards the sea* (*Til sjøs – Spre mare*)

⁹ „Rareori, o existență mai sbuciumată a tălmăcit mai bine un curent nou. [...] Cele șase cărțile ce cuprind toată opera sa, , [...], merită să fie cunoscute de toți acei, ce, în artă, caută personalitate rară și originală”. *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰ „Blând și modest, lipsit de orice pretenție, Obstfelder, și-a croit viața cu nesiguranță copilărească”. *Ibid.*

¹¹ „Obstfelder află nemărginirea în firul de praf ce scânteie la soare; simțea veșnicia în orice răsuflare; în tot ce scria, se lupta cu probleme de filozofie. Poezie și artă erau pentru el, proclamare a marilor idealuri, [...]”. *Ibid.*

¹² „căminul stelelor”. *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³ „Simți aceeași milă pentru durerile omenești, ce ardea în inima lui Dostoievski”. *Ibid.*, 111.

and some others. The Norwegian woman writer Astrid Hjertenæs Andersen used in her poetry nature, sensibility and art, having also a direct connection with the Romanian literature, as a result of her visit in Romania in the 1970s. She was impressed by the works of the famous Romanian sculptor, Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957), especially by *Bird in Space*. As we mentioned before, the Norwegian writer composed a poem entitled *Bird in Space* (*Brancusi-fuglen - en rumensk skulptur*) – *Pasărea lui Brâncuși*). *Lizard Embraces Woman* (*Kninnen og øglen – Femeia și șarpele*), *The Woman and the Dance* (*Kvinnen og dansen – Femeia și dansul*) are other translations that appear in the Romanian anthology.

Swedish and Danish poems translated into Romanian

In the following we will also refer, in a few lines, to the Swedish and Danish poems that were translated in the Romanian anthology of Modern Nordic Poetry (*Poezie nordică modernă*). Thus, Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) with the poems *Hamlet and Margareta*, Gunnar Ekelöf (1907 – 1968) with a number of nine poems translated into Romanian by Veronica Porumbacu and Petre Stoica, are only two Swedish poets who appear in the Romanian anthology. Among Gunnar Ekelöf's translated poems there are: *Late on Earth* (*Sent på jorden – Târziu, pe pământ*), *Legend* (*Sagan – Legendă*) and others. There are 36 Swedish writers each of them with two, five up to nine poems translated into Romanian. Regarding the Danish poets there is a number of 30 poets translated: Johannes V. Jensen (1873-1950), Otto Gelsted (1888-1968), Inger Christensen (1935-2009) and others.

Taking all these into consideration, the 20th century was the period when a great amount of translations were made from other languages into Romanian. Romanian translators such as Veronica Porumbacu, Tașcu Gheorghiu, Petre Stoica, Nora Iuga, Marcel Romanescu and others felt that they could relate themselves easier to the Norwegian literary works that had to be translated.

Romanian translators

Veronica Porumbacu (1921-1977) was a Romanian poet, translator and chief editor of the most representative Romanian cultural magazine *Viața Românească* (1949-1953). Besides Norwegian poetry, she also translated from Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), and Jean Racine (1639-1699). The fact that she translated Norwegian poetry

showed her interest in Nordic cultural life. In *Steaua* magazine, there is an article about Veronica Porumbacu published by the contemporary writer and essayist Adrian Popescu (b. 1947). He begins his article expressing his own regrets concerning the loss of such a “charming and detached, excited and thus moving us”¹⁴ [our translation], that was “the hardworking poet and translator”¹⁵ [our translation] Veronica Porumbacu. Unfortunately, she lost her life in the earthquake that took place in Romania in 1977. Adrian Popescu continues his noble characterization of Veronica Porumbacu’s literary work: “Her poem that pays attention to the imperious reality, to weather’s metamorphoses, vibrates at the miracle of love and at small but wonderful daily events”¹⁶ [our translation]. Towards the end of the publication, Adrian Popescu also mentions that through passion, understanding and patience, Veronica Porumbacu managed to translate an impressive number of German and Norwegian poems.

Petre Stoica (1931-2009) was as well both a poet and a translator. He made his debut in the Romanian literary magazine *Steaua* in Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest. Petre Stoica contributed with translations of Scandinavian poems in the Romanian anthology *Modern Nordic Poetry (Poezie nordică modernă)* together with Veronica Porumbacu and Tașcu Gheorghiu. He was often awarded for his well done translations.

Nora Iuga (b. 1933) is a poet, writer and translator from German and Swedish literature. She graduated from Bucharest University in 1953, the Germanic Philology Department. Tudor Vianu (1897-1964) and George Călinescu (1899-1965) were her teachers of literature. She was also a teacher of German between 1954 and 1955 when she went deeply into the study of Nordic texts.

Last but not least, the poet **Marcel Romanescu** (1897-1956) had great contributions to different Romanian culture magazines: *Flamura*, *Viața literară și artistică (Craiova)*, *Ramuri*, *Lumina nouă*, *Zorile*, *Glasul Bucovinei*, *Convorbiri literare*, *Gândirea* and many others. He made his editorial debut with the volume of “sonnets and poems”, namely *Clear Springs (Izvoare limpezi)* in 1923. As a hardworking translator he translated both from Johann

¹⁴ „fermecătoare și dezinvoltă, emoționată și emoționându-ne”. Adrian Popescu, „Veronica Porumbacu,” *Steaua* 3 (1977), 9.

¹⁵ „vrednică poetă și traducătoare”. *Ibid.*

¹⁶ „Poezia sa, atentă la imperativele realității, la metamorfozele vremii, vibrează la miracolul dragostei și al micilor dar minunatele întâmplări cotidiene”. *Ibid.*

W. Goethe (1749-1832), and from Norwegian poems such as Gunnar Heiberg (1857-1929) and Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866-1900). As we mentioned before, Marcel Romanescu wrote also an article in *Flamura* magazine about the poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder. Through this article, the Romanian translator presents an overview of the Norwegian poet's literary work. This publication consists of poems translated from Norwegian into Romanian: *I see (Jeg ser – Mă uit)* and some other poems.

Conclusions

The work of translation implies not only serious knowledge of the language from which one tries to translate, but also a very solid documentation related to the culture, literature and the social life of that specific country. Thus, the translator has to be a hardworking person and above all he or she has to be passionately fond of this work.

Veronica Porumbacu, Tașcu Gheorghiu and Petre Stoica are those writers who translated the two well structured volumes of *Modern Nordic Poetry (Poezie nordică modernă)*, which begin with a short preface that consists of interesting and useful information regarding the Scandinavian literature. In addition, at the end of the second volume there are brief biographical and bibliographical notes including the Scandinavian writers who were translated into Romanian.

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