Abstract
In Romania, the first half of the twentieth century was an interval of rich intercultural exchanges, which also embraced the form of translation. In fact, during this period, original creations were often paralleled by exceptional translations from the world literature performed by great names of the literary scene of the epoch such as Lucian Blaga, Tudor Arghezi and Ion Pillat. This paper aims to sketch Pillat’s activity as a translator. It enriched and completed his prolific poetic creations which were deeply influenced by the works he translated through a complex process of appropriation and distantiation.

Key words
Ion Pillat, translation, foreignization, translation agenda

In the panorama of Romanian letters, Ion Pillat (1881-1945), plays a special role, as a personality who fuses in an original manner directions which seem difficult to reconcile. He was a genuine European spirit, at the same time deeply concerned with his native country’s values and traditions. His poetic work was tightly interwoven with his personal life and the three stages of his poetic career bear the marks of the places where he felt at home: France, in Paris (1905-1914), Romania and Greece (where he made three trips, in 1927, 1933 and 1937, respectively). Each stage of creation closely reflects the time spent in any of these places. The poet makes proof of poetic bipolar tendencies: awareness of the roots he had in his native land and an attempt to escape in the exotic and the imaginary.

Pillat’s first volumes of poems such as Visâri pâgâne (1912) or Grâdina între ziduri (1919), have a detached tone, revealing the poet’s propensity for the diversity of European spaces, which took the form of exotic wanderings. A second period of his creation, visible in volumes such as Pe Argeş în sus (1923), Satul meu (1925), Biserica de altădată (1926), is under the sign of traditional inspiration. His
orientation towards the past is not an abstract praise of tradition in general, but as manifest in the past of a particular family, his family. His so-called traditionalist poems evoke the villages where he spent his childhood. They depict images of people and places where he lived happy moments. In close connection with this theme is the motif of time. The element of nature completes the triad (tradition, time, nature) of his poetry of traditionalist orientation.

The last volumes he published, among which the most poetically accomplished are *Scutul Minervei* (1934), *Caetul verde* (1937), witness a return to Oriental motifs and Greek mythology. The inspiration came from his direct voyages to Spain, Italy and Greece. These volumes are the most eclectic of all, resuming themes and motifs of his previous poetry, but presented in a new light. From this period there is one volume which is particularly worth mentioning, namely *Poeme într-un vers* (Poems in a line, 1935), a poetic experiment which attaches his name to modernist poetry. He considered that these poems were different from the Persian Rubbayat, the Japanese haiku or the Greek epigram, since they presented poetry reduced to its very essence.

Pillat was a promoter of synchronism that is the synchronisation of Romanian reality with the European cultural and technological progress, but also a supporter of traditionalism; he pleaded for modernism but found deep comfort in the rigours of classicism.

All these eclectic preoccupations make it difficult to attach Pillat to just one literary movement. His poetry can be included in distinct categories. He may be considered a traditionalist, but also a symbolist or a neoclassic, depending on the sources of his poetic inspiration; what is certain is that he is a bridge between modernism and the preceding generations.

The evolution of his poetic work witnesses on the one hand a subtle search for identity. On the other hand, his poems reflect the affinities he had with certain artists, writers or painters, at a particular moment of his life. The itinerary of his work mirrors his cultural experiences and literary encounters, which create a unitary whole.

Pillat was an extremely erudite poet, with a vast knowledge of the literature of all times, covering a wide range of cultures and forms of manifestation. He read works in the original, regardless of whether the author was Heine, Ovid, Baudelaire or Quevedo. He assimilated the poetry of the world which is reflected in his poetry as a sign of profound respect and acknowledgment. His poetic efforts witness “a huge
recapitulative availability and an experiment cultivated with a special vocation of a restorer or conserver of some poetic museum” [1, 18].

The poet tried his hand at all types of poetic genres, from the Persian Rubbayat to the Japanese haiku. In one of his literary confessions, he proposed critics, for entertainment’s sake, to study the influences of his academic reading on the poetry of his early volumes imbued with allusions and proper names.

Pillat’s numerous trips abroad and his interest in European poetic experiments find their expression in the impressive amount of foreign literature he translated. Being so organically tied to poetry, his activity as a translator came as a natural manifestation of his preoccupations. He translated from 1914 until 1944, one year before his death. His translating agenda reflects his various interests in world poetry, mapping the literary tastes of a poet deeply preoccupied with the dialogue between cultures. The need to translate was not only the manifestation of his love for poetry, but also an attempt, which proved to be highly successful, to introduce Romanians to universal poetry. His interest in the modernist poetry was unparalleled in the epoch. The selection of the works he translated covers two axes. One of them contains poets akin to his spiritual structure such as Pierre Ronsard, Jean Moréas, Francis Jammes, Wolfgang von Goethe or Stefan George.

But he also approached through translation the works of great names of modernist poetry such as T.S. Eliot, St. John-Perse or Georg Trakl, so distinct from his own sensitivity and poetic personality. By means of this translation agenda, he revealed his intention of introducing the less known forms of European poetry to the Romanian readership. In 1933 he translated Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, which he considered among the four or five masterpieces of European poetry of the century. As literary critic Mircea Martin argues, “through *Anabasis* and *The Waste Land*, Pillat became the national promoter of a highly valuable and modern literature, which threw bridges to the past over the avant-garde, which, however, it did not ignore” [7, 11].

The translating efforts Pillat made immensely contributed to disseminating modern world poetry in Romanian literature, thus ensuring the synchronisation of Romanian letters with the European and American movements of the time [7, 435]. The logical consequence of such an endeavour and Pillat’s intimate hope was that his translations would represent an impetus for Romanian poets and would count as useful tools for the refinement of Romanian poetry.
The names of authors translated by Pillat range from the French symbolists to German poets, both classic and modern, as well as representatives of the Spanish, Italian, British and American poetry. This preoccupation with the great variety of the human lyric potential witnesses a desire to merge with the Other and hints at the existence of a genuine meditation on poetry and the world in general. Towards the end of his life, he would have liked to gather all his translations under the title *Sufletul altora* (The Others’ Soul) [9, 21] as an homage to all those with whom he managed to establish an intimate spiritual relation through translation.

His numerous literary essays, which he published in the volume *Portrete lirice*, aimed at popularizing various foreign literatures. Essays such as “Don Quixote”, “The Irish Soul in Poetry: William Butler Yeats”, “Modern American Poetry”, contain comments on some of the authors he translated. As a matter of fact, he translated almost all the poets he glossed on. The translations were usually published first, followed by his comments which served as a critical apparatus [9, 450].

Although he did not have a translation theory proper, he approached this task with great professional responsibility, even piety. He considered translation an act of interaction, which requires the presence of a mediator. In all modesty, he called his own translations “exercises of lyric equivalence” and his observations on the act of translation may be found, as is the case with many other poet translators, in the forewords of the translated works.

As for his dedication, one of his collaborators, Oscar Walter Cisek, together with whom he translated Rilke, stated that when Pillat worked, he would forget about food or rest. For each word, syllable or phonetic nuance he would come up with a whole range of possible Romanian variants. He would pronounce every word, sound or cadence until the rhymes and rhythms could be somewhat superposed over the original without a single syllable ruining the organic harmony of the work. Such application goes beyond the mere desire of doing a good job; it is an expression of total adoration of poetry and the awareness of the responsibility the translator has as the messenger of somebody else’s work.

A real modern translator, Pillat also emphasised the readers’ role in deciphering a text. In 1932 he translated St. John Perses *Anabase*. In his foreword, Pillat warned about the poem’s obscurity and hinted at the need of readers’ collaboration. The understanding of the poem, in Pillat’s opinion, required a certain intellectual agility which may be acquired in time and a particular intuitive imagination that has to be
inborn. In a note to his version of Perse’s *Anabase*, Pillat also provided a number of clarifications on his translation strategies, which could be easily applied to all his translations:

I tried to be, first of all, faithful to the translated work, maintaining, as much as possible, not only the meaning and intentions of the poem, not only its rhythm and movement, but also the tone and texture of the original. I also tried, which was even more difficult, but essential, to create in Romanian an equivalent poetic style that could preserve the autochthonous flavour [8, 34].

The poet’s concern with the synchronisation of Romanian letters with European literary movements is also manifest in his assiduous correspondence with literary personalities such as St. John Perse, Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Claudel or Jules Romains. His literary preferences, visible in his selection for translation or in his literary essays, *Portrete lirice* (Lyrical portraits, 1936), indicate not only the concept Pillat had on poetry and his support of the artistic movements of the time. They also witness the preoccupation of Romanian letters in the interwar period with reaching a point of convergence between the European spirit and the local forms of expression.

In the overall panorama of interwar Romanian translations, Pillat was a somewhat atypical figure. With respect to translation selection criteria, Even-Zohar states that a culture/language is selected for translation due to its economic and political prestige [4, 66]. This is certainly true for the Romanian and French cultures in between wars. In Romania, the literary taste was dictated by what was fashionable in Paris [3, 181]. The translation activity as a professional occupation was at its beginnings and, as such, was subordinated to external considerations, mainly of economic nature. Private publishing houses were mostly interested in literature that would sell quickly, the obvious consequence being at times ignorance of any aesthetic criteria.

Among literary genres, poetry was hardly ever translated, since it did not suit the tastes of the masses. In terms of possible influences through translation, interwar writers, like most readers of the élite, extracted literary information from original works, which belonged mostly to the French culture or, if not, through translations into French, therefore in a mediated manner [5, 17].

In this general context, dominated by literary influences of the French, Pillat’s selection for translation of poetry belonging to the Anglo-American demonstrates
the translator’s concern with opening new perspectives to Romanian letters and, implicitly, Romanian readers. He was deeply aware that in order to enlarge their horizon, Romanian letters had to look for models beyond the already used paths of France or Germany. The purpose was to encompass literary experiences that moved away from the all too well-known patterns of literary behaviour. Thus, he claimed that “Romanian poetry, which imitates so easily everything that literary fashion brings from Paris, Rome and Berlin, would better look to the success of American poetry as to a model to follow”. Critic Petru Comarnescu argues that by 1946, nobody had strived and succeeded more than Pillat in introducing American poets in Romania.

At the time Pillat was performing his translations, the Romanian literary system did not have a translation policy proper. The élite could read in the original and the masses had at their disposal many novels, the main criterion for the translation of which was that they were easily accessible and therefore could sell well.

Before 1945, translations were hardly ever accompanied by prefaces, presentations of the author’s life and works that could have enlarged the literary knowledge of readers and raise the standards of their literary tastes. But Pillat was a professional translator, fully aware of his role as mediator between the two cultures connected through translation. He tried to impose the great names of world literature signing critical essays on their work. Given the fact that one of the functions of his translations was to revitalize Romanian letters and educate Romanian readers, it was expected that a didactic purpose would guide his translation strategies.

Besides the fashion of the time, with its restrictions, its already established canons and criteria, the poetics of the period also influences a translator’s decisions, as Andre Lefèvere points out. The poetics indicates what translations are acceptable in a certain system, at a given moment.

Another factor refers to what Lefèvere names “ideology”, to which the translator subscribes willingly or not and which dictates the strategies to use both with respect to the translation of the source text content and the linguistic choices. Yet another motivation behind the choice of a text to translate is the translator’s own interpretation of the ST, which may or may not be compliant with the ideology or poetics of the time [6, 36-41].

In choosing the Anglo-American modernists, Pillat went against the mainstream poetics of the time, which favoured French literature. A visionary and a modern translator in his own right, he opted thus for the path of foreignizing, understood
not only as a translation strategy meant to indicate clearly the alterity of a foreign
text, but as the selection of a text “which challenges the contemporary canon of
foreign literature in the target language” [11, 148].

Classic English poets had already been translated into Romanian to a higher or
lesser extent, but the translation of a poetry such as Anglo-American modernists
was a challenge, considering the fact that the Romanian poetry of the time was
widely under the spell of French symbolism and surrealism, although German
expressionism also appealed to Romanian poets such as Lucian Blaga or Adrian
Maniu.

Pillat’s translating efforts were an attempt at broadening the literary perspective of
Romanian readers and challenging the virtues and linguistic possibilities of the
Romanian poetic language, by granting a linguistic and literary utility to the source
text.

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