

BULETINUL Universității Petrol – Gaze din Ploiești	Vol. LXII No. 2/2010	141-146	Seria Filologie
---	-------------------------	---------	-----------------

A Few Considerations on Ion Pillat's Translation of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Roxana Ștefania Bîrsanu

Romanian-American University, Bulevardul Expozitiei 1B, Bucharest
E-mail: roxanabirsanu25@yahoo.com

Abstract

The translation of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land signed by Ion Pillat introduced the Anglo-American modernist poet to the Romanian readership. Pillat's version is a successful example of intercultural mediation. It displays a constant concern with maintaining a balance between the foreignness of the source text and the expectations of the target readers with respect to a poem belonging to the Anglo-American space. Whereas most of the translation techniques used by Pillat reveal a preference for fluent translations, his selection of the author/poem to render into Romanian witnesses his desire to enrich the literary experiences of the Romanian readers.

Key Words: *Ion Pillat, translation, domestication, translation strategies*

Immediately after its publication, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* started being translated in various European languages such as French, Spanish or German. This interest evidenced, in a way, the fact that the poem was acknowledged all around Europe as one of the manifestoes of Anglo-American modernism. Even if at the time of the poem publication (1922), Romanian letters were largely under the spell of French literature, eleven years later, in 1933, Ion Pillat, a visionary and a great lover of poetry, produced the first translation of *The Waste Land* into Romanian. Over the years, the poem was translated by four other translations, made at different moments in time: Aurel Covaci published his version in 1970 in a compilation of poems signed by Eliot, *Cele mai frumoase poezii* (Editura Albatros), Mircea Ivănescu published his in 1982 in the anthology *Poezie americană modernă și contemporană* (Editura Dacia), Alex Moldovan signed the translation of *The Waste Land* in 2004 (Editura Paralela 45) and the latest translation was made by Șerban Dragoș Ionescu (in *România literară*) in 2009. There are also partial translations. Thus, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș and Toma Pavel translated Part V, "What the Thunder Said", which was published in *Secolul XX*, Issue 1, 1965. A.E. Baconsky rendered into Romanian Part I, "Burial of the Dead" and Part IV, "Death by Water", which he published in his *Panorama poeziei universale contemporane* (1972).

Ion Pillat's efforts as a translator successfully complete his literary activity. 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.

The translating efforts Pillat made immensely contributed to disseminating modern world poetry in Romanian literature, thus ensuring the synchronisation of Romanian culture

with the European and American movements of the time. 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.

There are several issues that drew Pillat toward Eliot: his taste of classicism and antiquity which, in Eliot's case, represented an extensive use of mythology; the English poet's broad consideration of world literature and the rich complex of cultures reflected in his work.

Pillat embarked on translating *The Waste Land* in 1933, eleven years after its publication, in magazine *Azi*, Issue 3 of February-March 1933. In the next issue, he published an article entitled simply "Thomas Stearns Eliot". Here, Pillat touched upon Eliot's career as a critic, emphasising, however, that "the poet Eliot is even more interesting than the critic". Without providing a critical analysis of the poem, the translator stressed the significance of *The Waste Land* in the Anglo-American literature, indicating that, similarly to Joyce's *Ulysses*, it marked "the end of a literary era and the beginning of another" [4, 767].

Given the fact that Eliot's poetry was introduced for the first time to Romanian readers, Pillat might have considered useful to provide at least some basic information on the poet and his work. At the same time, by doing so, he somewhat justified the reasons that led to his selection of Eliot as a poet to translate. In all honesty, he warned his readers of the difficulties of the text when he specified that the excessively synthetic nature of the poem may give the impression of being obscure, a feeling which vanishes at a more careful reading.

Towards the end of the article, Pillat made a number of observations on his version and on the difficulties he encountered in translation:

I further add that one of the charms but also difficulties of the text is the fact that Eliot constantly imbeds lines – famous ones or merely some he liked – taken not only from the British literature, to which he often gives new meanings [...] With respect to the translation, faithful as much as possible, it strived to maintain at least the spirit and the letter of the original, if it often failed to render its entire beauty [4, 768].

The choice a translator makes with respect to the text he tackles broadly depends on several factors. One is the literary fashion of the time, with its restrictions, its already established canons and criteria. This is what Andre Lefevere calls the poetics of a period, which indicates what translations are acceptable in a certain system, at a given moment.

Another factor refers to what Lefevere 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 [2, 170].

In choosing the Anglo-American modernists and particularly Eliot, Pillat went against the mainstream poetics of the time in Romania, 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" [5, 148].

One of the reasons for which Pillat embarked on such a difficult task might have been his great admiration for the collage of cultures Eliot presented in the poem, in an attempt at broadening the literary perspective of Romanian readers. Another factor could have been, bearing in mind the pedagogical purposes with which Pillat endowed the translation activity, that of challenging the virtues and linguistic possibilities of the Romanian poetic language, by granting some sort of linguistic and literary utility to the source text.

Ion Pillat's 1933 translation did not receive the praise and attention it deserved from the critics of the time. This seeming neglect can be explained through various reasons. One such reason is that translation critical reviews were scarce at the time. When translations were indeed reviewed, they focused on an overview of the translated authors' works rather than on the intrinsic value of the translation or the translator's name. At the time Pillat performed his translation, Eliot's name was not familiar to an extensive number of Romanian readers.

Another reason for this synchronic neglect could be the position held by translations from the American and British literature in the Romanian literary system. According to translation theorist Even-Zohar [1, 49], within the translation polysystem, its various sections are subject to certain dynamics which dictates their central or peripheral position. In 1933, when Pillat wrote his version, translations from works belonging to the English-speaking world held a marginal position as compared to those from French. Eliot's name was introduced then for the first time to the Romanian readership, together with other modernist writers who were making history in the literature of the time.

Pillat's version differentiates itself from the other Romanian target texts in various respects. For instance, in the case of proper names, both toponyms and anthroponyms, Pillat opted for exonyms, whereas the other translators chose transferences. "Saint Mary Woolnoth", "Queen Victoria Street" or "Lil" are, in Pillat's text, "Sfânta Maria Woolnoth", "Strada Reginei Victoria" and "Lili". Pillat opted for the translation of almost all proper names, where this was possible, attempting to take the text as close to the readers as possible. The use of exonyms is in keeping with the general domesticating orientation of Pillat's translation. It was an inspired translation decision, considering that at the time he produced his Romanian variant of Eliot's poem, Romanian readers were not very familiar with the Anglo-American cultural and literary context. Nevertheless, in Pillat's text there are a few exceptions from the use of exonyms. These refer to "Mylae", "Smyrna", "Canon Street Hotel", which are kept with the form they have in the source text, breaking the coherence of the treatment of the other toponyms, introducing sudden foreign references that might confuse the readers. There is also a case of mistranslation which concerns the hotel name "Metropole", which Pillat interpreted as "metropolis, big city" and translated it accordingly, as "metropolă".

Register is another component of the source text which may represent a real challenge for translators. It is the case with the dialogue between Lil, a wife overwhelmed by the burden of raising five children on her own in war times, and her friend, both belonging to the same social category.

Differences in register as compared to the remaining text are immediately visible in the flouting of grammar rules, coherence of ideas, choice of vocabulary and certain spelling indications that suggest a particular pronunciation. The translators' task is to grasp the idea of identity involved by the language of the specific speech community the characters belong to. At the same time, they should be able to seize the impact of such register in the ST and try to obtain the same effect and impact in the TL. Pillat's version is the most neutral of all Romanian texts and the change of register is indicated in the organization of sentences rather than in the choice at lexical level:

Dar de pleacă Albert, nu va fi din lipsă de a te fi prevenit.
Ar trebui să-ți fie rușine, am spus, să arăți atât de antică
(Și ea n-are decât treizeci și unu).
N-am ce face, a spus ea, strâmbând din nas
[...]

Ești într-adevăr nebună, am zis¹.

The words employed by Pillat could hardly be imagined as uttered by a lower middle class woman. In this respect, the other Romanian versions are more marked both at sentence and at word level. For instance, Covaci translated "If Albert makes off" as "Dacă Albert se cară" and Moldovan as "Dacă Albert o șterge". Likewise, "You are a proper fool" is rendered by Ivănescu as "Ești chiar tâmpită" and by Moldovan as "Ești nebună de legat". Consideration should also be given to the fact that the degree of what is tolerated with respect to colloquial formulations at different points in time varies considerably. Therefore, the lexical solutions the other translators proposed in their version might have sounded exaggerated to the ears of Romanian readers in the thirties.

The time distance between the translations is visible at various levels. One diachronic coordinate which indicates the time span dividing the translations is the archaic spelling of different grammar categories, from verbs to nouns and adverbs. Along with the archaic spelling, Pillat's version also contains words that are not used anymore in everyday language, but which survive in poetry translation when used to achieve an archaizing effect, usually to reflect the production moment of the ST. The parallel synonyms present in the other two translations are more neutral and therefore less loaded with poetic force. Therefore, the TT "pool" is rendered by Pillat as "tău", "lands" as "țarină" and "handsome" as "chipeș", whereas the other translators used "izvor", "pământuri" and "frumos" for the same source words.

The word choice in the translations clearly indicates the time distance separating them. In fact, a reader who is not aware of the year Pillat wrote his version (1933) could easily approximate it even if considering only the vocabulary level. What mainly marks this distance is that in Pillat's version there are words which are no longer in common use and others which, in time, have acquired a marked poetic aura.

These are words which used, for example, by a contemporary translator, have the role of indicating the time of the source text, if it happens to be very distant from the translation moment. They belong to various grammar categories: verbs – 'a adăsta' for "to wait" (FS l. 115-116: "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits" — 'În ceasul violet, când ochii și umerii / Se ridică de pe birou, când mașina umană adastă'), 'a zbucni' for "to grow" (BD l. 19-20 "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow?/Out of this stony rubbish?" — 'Ce rădăcini sunt astea de se țin înțeleștate, ce crengi zbucnesc / Din aceste surpături de piatră?'), 'a se depărta' for "to depart" (FS l. 175: "The Nymphs are departed" — 'Nimfele s-au depărtat'), 'a isprăvi' for "to be over" (FS l. 252: 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over' — 'Eh, s-a făcut și sunt bucurăoasă că s-a isprăvit'); nouns: 'Prier' for "April" (BD l. 1: "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land" — 'Prier e cea mai crădună, născând / Flori de liliac din țara moartă'), 'vântre' for "sail" (WTS l. 419-420: "Damyatta: The boat responded / Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar" — 'Damyatta: Luntrea ăspunse / Bucuros mânei îndemnatice la vântrele și vâslă'), 'portărel' for "solicitor" (WTS l. 409: "Or under seals broken by the lan solicitor" — 'Sau sub pecetii rupte de portărelul jigărit'). This last noun reflects the reality of Pillat's time, when a 'portărel' was a sort of a debt collector, a profession that no longer exists. In the remaining four translations, "solicitor" is rendered by 'avocat', because the profession does not have an equivalent in the Romanian legal system.

In Pillat, there is also a series of words which underwent a spelling modification and for this reason may sound quite archaic to modern readers when encountered with the old forms:

¹ But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling. / You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique. / (And her only thirty-one) / I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face / [...] / You are a proper fool, I said.

‘cari’ for ‘care’ meaning “who”, ‘dretica’ for ‘deretica’ meaning “to clean”, ‘a turbura’ for ‘a tulbura’ meaning “to disturb”, ‘ebreu’ for ‘evreu’ meaning “Jew” or ‘djungla’ for ‘jungla’ meaning “jungle”.

As far as the modern readership is concerned, the translation clearly indicates a time distance as to the original poem. The translator being only a mediator, the contemporary readers have access to the source text through the translation. Therefore, they enter the ST world via the translated text. The result might be a higher degree of detachment and less emotional involvement since the reality of the ST is very clearly emphasised as temporally distant.

Another issue worth mentioning from the viewpoint of the time distance between the translations is the use of neologisms in Pillat’s text. According to Newmark,

neologisms are either new words naming newly invented or imported objects or processes or new expressions that suddenly fill one of the innumerable gaps in a language’s resources for handling human thought and feelings at some level of formality [3,122].

The different treatment of the same source terms reveals the evolution they underwent in language. In his translation, Pillat employs the following terms between inverted commas: “clairvoyant”, “weekend” and “City”:

Madame Sosostriș, faimoașă “clairvoyantă”
Avea un guturai, cu toate acestea
E cunoscută drept cea mai înțeleaptă femeie din Europa.
[...]
Nimfele s-au depărtat.
Și amicii lor, trândavii moștenitori ai bancherilor din “City”.
[...]
M-a poftit într-o franțuzească demotică
Să iau dejunul la Canon Stret Hotel,
Urmată de un “weekend” în Metropolă².

It goes without saying that in resorting to this technique of using inverted commas to indicate foreign words, Pillat indicates to his readers that these are not Romanian words. Emphasising their foreign nature, he stressed their cultural English specificity.

The other translators used precisely the same terms, but without marking them in any way: they are simply assimilated by the text. This indicates that the terms are already used or known by Romanians (“weekend” as such and “City” as the symbol of the financial district) and therefore the translators’ expectations with respect to their readers’ knowledge are quite high. Moldovan is the only one who preserved ‘weekend’ with the graphic modification ‘week-end’ and translated “City” as “oraș”, a decision which deprives the term of its symbolic connotations.

The lack of any typographic signalling may suggest thus the degree of familiarization, and with it, acceptance of the terms designating a distinct cultural reality. On the other hand, it could be a technique consistent with the general foreignizing orientation of the translations, in which case the readers are exposed to yet other instances of the foreign culture of the ST.

² Madame Sosostriș, famous clairvoyante, / Had a bad cold, nevertheless / Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe. / [...] / The nymphs are departed. / And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors. / [...] / Asked me in demotic French / To luncheon at the Canon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

“Clairvoyantă” is a special case. Pillat and Covaci adapted it by adding the feminine ending “ă”. It is quite clear, judging by the treatment of other neologisms, that Pillat considered it one of Eliot's idiosyncratic expressions. Besides, at the time he was translating *The Waste Land*, French was the language in fashion in Romania at that time; therefore, he might have justly assumed that the word would sooner or later be assimilated in Romanian (as was the case with “weekend”). Both Pillat and Covaci were aware of the fact that this adapted French word was used ironically in English. Therefore, in using “clairvoyantă”, they maintained in Romanian as well the ironic effect that dominates the entire fragment which makes reference to Madame Sosostris.

As one would note from the translation strategies he favoured, Pillat's version has a marked domesticating tendency. His translation techniques reveal an attempt at making the text as accessible as possible to a high number of readers. This aim probably accounts for the overexplicitations in the Notes and the omission of paratextual elements such as the information on the title page. The Romanian literature was only initiating its contact with masterpieces of English literature. In this context, it was natural that the concern of acceptability should be given prominence over adequacy. His version manages to preserve the message of the original, as regards both content and form, being at the same time an extraordinary success of poetic expression in Romanian.

Bibliography

1. Even-Zohar, Itamar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem” in Itamar Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*. Special Issue of *Poetics Today*, 11:1, 1990, pp. 45-51.
2. Lefevere, Andre, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London & New York: Routledge, 1992.
3. Newmark, Peter, *A Textbook of Translation*, Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1988.
4. Pillat, Ion, “Thomas Stearns Eliot”, *Azi*, No. 3, 1933, pp. 766-768.
5. Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator's Invisibility*, London: Routledge, 1995.

Câteva observații privind traducerea poemului *The Waste Land* a lui T.S: Eliot de către Ion Pillat

Rezumat

Traducerea poemului The Waste Land semnată de Ion Pillat a facilitat primul contact dintre poetul modernist anglo-american și cititorii români. Versiunea lui Pillat este un exemplu reușit de mediere interculturală. Este ușor de observat preocuparea constantă de a păstra echilibrul între specificitatea textului sursă și așteptările cititorilor țintă referitor la un poem din spațiul anglo-american. Dacă majoritatea tehnicilor de traducere folosite de Pillat indică o preferință pentru traducerile fluente, alegerea acestui autor/poem sugerează dorința poetului român de a îmbogăți experiența culturală a cititorilor săi.