The Limits of (Un)translatability
Culturemes in Translation Practice

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THIS PAPER engages with the tension between what has been called "untranslatability" in discussions pertaining to Comparative Literature (or, more recently, World Literature) and its implications for Translation Studies in general and for the practice of translation in particular, with a focus on the translation of culturemes. This approach can be viewed as a dialogue between the macro/ top-down/ theoretical remit of Comparative Literature and the micro/ bottom-up/ practice-oriented approach of the translator. The positional implications of this formulation are less than felicitous; however, they are meant to suggest a critique of the current state of affairs in and between the disciplines involved. As this paper is occasioned by the translation into English of the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* (2004–2009, second edition 2016–), the challenges faced in the translation of culturemes will be illustrated based on various dictionary entries, particularly because a dictionary of literature is evidently dappled with culturemes. Moreover, the translators have no precedent to relate to, no trodden ground to work with, a fact that makes their undertaking all the more challenging. Two types of cultureme will be discussed: one that reflects Romania's historically conditioned cultural mélange and another that embodies strong ideological overtones in literary discourse. The former relates particularly to Wallachia's past under Ottoman rule or influence and its contemporary cultural and linguistic effects, the latter to a literary current entitled *poporanism* which poses dilemmas to translators due to its highly ideological charge. The paper therefore evinces a four-part structure: a discussion of untranslatability's current status in the humanities, a philosophical and ideological argument on untranslatability, followed by an examination of historical culturemes and their translation and finally by the analysis of an ideologically charged cultureme.

1. Untranslatability: Current Critical Developments

RECENTLY, UNTRANSLATABILITY has gained spectacular currency in the humanities, a fact most often traced back to Emily Apter's *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013) and Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2004; 2014 in English). Apter's declared intention is to "invoke untranslatability as a deflationary gesture towards the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors"[1] in an attempt to question "tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability or . . . the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' that have been niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities.'"[2] While the notion of "untranslatability" is anything but new, harking back at least to Luther's translation of the Bible and the ensuing controversies, it has sparked a fierce debate in current scholarship, a fact evinced by edited collections published within the last three years—*Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translations, Markets* (2016), *Untranslatability Goes Global* (2018), *Untranslatability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2019)—and by a host of articles and papers published in various journals, most notably issue 17 of *n+1*, entitled "The Evil Issue" (2013).[3]

As was to be expected, while many of the articles and chapters engage with the concept of "untranslatability" in a tone of agreement, dissenting voices are also making themselves heard. Gauti Kristmannsson, for example, finds both Apter's claim and *n+1*'s clamorous Marxist reaction[4] to her poststructuralist attitude of doubt elitist and reactionary for righteously circumscribing 'suitable' readerships and critical constituencies of World Literature, whether they be academics versed in the hermeneutics of suspicion or "a borderless audience of radicals."[5] Kristmannsson further criticizes Apter's undertaking for its "neo-philological angst," "neo-theoretical angst,"[6] and "institutional angst,"[7] as well as for "the way she puts world literature and translation into one pot and stokes the fire."[8] "Untranslatability" does indeed lend itself to an easy and instrumental appropriation by Comparative/World Literature, whereby the recent achievements of translation studies are successfully belittled and a more thorough engagement with actual translations is eschewed, as Helgesson and Vermeulen point out.[9]

Klaus Mundt is another critic of "untranslatability" in its current conception, which he finds not only unhelpful, but indeed pernicious to translation studies and practice, as he argues that its present circulation is politically motivated as well as based on a narrow definition of translation itself.[10] Taking a look at non-European translation contexts, he comes to the conclusion that translation has been an "inherently necessary, desirable and possible activity in and across different cultural systems,"[11] thus (un)wittingly countering Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Derridean claim that "in every possible sense, translation is necessary, but impossible."[12] Mundt demonstrably has a bone to pick with deconstruction and postmodernism; however, his analogy between deconstruction and colonialism is compelling, as is his thesis that, at a political level, untranslatability is a "matter of choice rather than an *a priori* condition"[13] and the implication that "untranslatability" is a Euro-centric contraption. David Gramling goes one step further in his claim that "untranslatability" is an affront to translation by drafting ten scenarios for ten areas in which "untranslatability" gives offence, ranging from transla-

tors, through philosophy, politics (via *sovereignty*) and social sciences (via the "right to untranslatability"), to gender studies, philology and disability studies. In his view, given that we are living during the *linguacene* ("this age of global simultaneous translation"[14]), we cannot afford favoring "worry over work, scandal over sustenance, grievance over dialogue, and elite rumination over popular access."[15] In the context of mass migration, "acute planetary suffering, for-profit war and aggravated intercultural misrepresentation,"[16] this indulgence which "untranslatability" represents is destructive.

As will be obvious by now, the discourse of "untranslatability"'s detractors hails from the translational camp. Consequently, we will distance ourselves from both the theoretical macro-level of World Literature and from the English-centered (albeit panEuropean) debate in order to focus on what has been attempted in other critical idioms and/or cultures, in particular in Romania, but also in Central and Eastern Europe. The first concept to make itself conspicuous within the framework of (un)translatability is the "cultureme," a notion scarcely encountered in translation literature in English. Coined by Raymond Cattell in 1949, the concept has been revived by the Estonian-Swedish linguist Els Oksaar in her 1988 *Kuluremtheorie: Ein Beitrag zur Sprachverwendungsforschung*.[17] The cultureme is the smallest unit carrying cultural (and culture-specific) information, a concept developed analogically to, for example, the phoneme, the morpheme or the lexeme.[18] However, in contradistinction to these, the cultureme is not a linguistic concept, but one related to extralinguistic, social and cultural contexts, denoting a social phenomenon that is specific to a certain culture which, however, emerges as such only by comparison to another culture which lacks that phenomenon. The concept of cultureme has been taken up by Skopos theorists like Christiane Nord, Hans Vermeer and Heidrun Witte. Interestingly, in Romanian translation studies, it has mushroomed in academic papers and articles written in Romanian, German and English, and a book-length study by Georgiana Lungu-Badea written in Romanian.[19] Most of the articles are concerned with strategies for translating culturemes as evinced by various translations to or from Romanian, while Lungu-Badea's book takes care to delimit the cultureme from the allusion, the quotation, the connotation, the cultism, the neologism, the socioleme and the translateme and to offer models of translation analysis and evaluation.

2. The Cultureme As the Untranslatable

THE CULTUREME, an element containing cultural information, exists as such in "only one of the two cultures being compared."[20] Viewed in this way, the cultureme is not of a static nature, but emerges as "a social phenomenon [that] is opposed to another social phenomenon, apparently alike, but which are deeply different and characterize particular communities."[21] The metadiscourse in which culturemes oppose their forces when one tries to translate them acquires a political nuance, evoking David Gramling's notion of *sovereignty*, which is, in Apter's terms the equivalent of the Untranslatable, a symptom of difference.[22] This will be addressed later in the paper. Jan Pederson shows that cultural transfer does not work solely through language and sug-

gests a middle-of-the-road point of view, asserting that some things are intralinguistic, while others are extralinguistic. Pederson's way of seeing things conceives of the cultureme as an ECR (Extralinguistic Culture-bound Reference): "Extralinguistic Culture-bound Reference (ECR) is defined as reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience."[23]

In this way the translation of ECRs can be undertaken using various strategies proposed by Pederson in the following taxonomy: (1) official equivalent, (2) retention, (3) specification, (3.1) explicitation, (3.2) addition, (4) direct translation, (5) generalization, (6) substitution, (6.1) cultural substitution, (6.2) paraphrase, (6.2.1) paraphrase with sense transfer, (6.2.2) situational paraphrase, (7) omission.[24] It is very clear, from this perspective, that translation is a process always having to choose between Derrida's Quantitative or Qualitative Law, i.e. translation never respects a 1:1 ratio to the original. This may seem counterintuitive, but it also supports the thesis of the possibility of translation. Moreover, translation is possible even in situations when the code is changed. One should take into account that statistical analysis, for example, is a translation of the same event that is analyzed with the means of, say, psychology. The same happens within language by switching codes; the same happens with the understanding of paradigms. Maybe their meaning cannot be grasped at the moment, in the present, but it all unfolds if considered in retrospect. Thus incommensurability is not really incommensurable, even though one has to admit that there actually is something that does not really translate entirely. Having acknowledged this, one must consider Klaus Mundt's point of view regarding the reasons why some advocate untranslatability. In his subchapter "Untranslatability as Theoretical and Philosophical Point of Contention"[25] he reiterates the accusations that postmodernism comes in the guise of a colonial rule trying to impose its condition. This is visible, he continues, in the inner dynamics of postmodernism itself, in the way that its proponents are blind to views other than theirs. His contention is argued with an example of ideological blindness:

> Evidence for that can be found, for instance, in Dirlik and Zhang, who embark on a search for the "global condition of postmodernity" (1997: 18) in China. Arguably the Confucian-based, humanistic and collectivist Chinese philosophical tradition does not easily accommodate notions of postmodernity. This is because the postmodern tends to call for the disruption of established systems and structures to counter teleological explanations of society and history (Choat 2010: 130), while the Confucian value system is arguably very much teleological (Fan 2002; Wang 2005). Although it could be argued that Confucian values have declined in importance in contemporary China (Fan 2002), Cheng (2002: 367) maintains that there remains in Chinese philosophy a tendency towards unity, harmony and continuity that originates from Chinese traditions, such as Confucianism and Taoism; and these values stand in stark contrast to the deliberately disruptive postmodern. Thus, in their insistence on the validity of "the postmodern condition" to the Chinese context, by ignoring the inherent philosophical tradition of the system they analyze,

> *Dirlik and Zhang quite nonchalantly impose their own ideology on an unsuitable context.*[26]

The example of China as a culture containing two different forces always in opposition is instructive because it puts forth a truistic argument which becomes more powerful when it is reinforced by other examples showing that every culture functions in this paradoxical way. For example, the Romanian interwar cultural scene was the battleground of contradictory ideologies, Traditionalism and Modernism. This takes us back to translatables and untranslatables, which coexist within language in the form of the cultureme. They are each other's shadow. Simultaneously, when something is translated, something is non-translated. In this way, culture as language and language as culture appear to be a network of elements having multiple and latent virtual combinatory possibilities. This may seem a commonplace, but the translators are the key operators, for they transform possibilities into probabilities by activating them, thus implying that translation "is a pragmatic choice, not an issue of indeterminacy of meaning."[27]

It is not only counterintuitive to edit a dictionary, or a lexicon as Barbara Cassin likes to call it, that is trying to render the meaning of the words called "untranslatables," but it is a task impossible to fulfill for evident reasons. However, Untranslatables do not refer to words that have no equivalent in the Target Language/Code, but to words whose meanings contain semantic subtleties that morph into *Sovereignties* that try to resist *negotiation* during the translation process. Translating a word, not only in Apter's view, is a process involving the negotiation of differences. When this negotiation is appropriately contextualized, the word has been translated adequately. In her "Introduction" to the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, Barbara Cassin suggests that "to speak of untranslatables in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: *the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating*."[28] It seems very clear that what the author speaks of are the pragmatic choices of the translators as the way in which they conduct the negotiation, which is a process of great importance since the meaning of the Untranslatable contains an element which is resistant to translation-negotiation, a quality of the meaning called by David Gramling and others the Sovereign, i.e. "that which does not get translated or can withhold translation discretionarily."[29] In this view, Apter goes on to define the Untranslatable as being afflicted by something negative (the forces of the translation process) and culminating in a symptomatology: "This effect of the non-carry-over (of meaning) that carries over nonetheless (on the back of grammar), or that transmits at a half-crocked semantic angle, endows the Untranslatable with a distinct symptomology. Words that assign new meanings to old terms, neologisms, names for ideas that are continually re-translated or mistranslated, translations that are obviously incommensurate (as in the use of esprit for 'mind' or Geist), these are among the most salient symptoms of the genuine Untranslatable."[30]

This excerpt does not constitute a traditional definition of the concept, because the Untranslatable is not a localized structure: it can be the word itself, or only a small part of it; it depends on the context. Thus, the Untranslatable is the structure that disrupts the Target Language. Consequently, what Apter means is not that there is no

strategy to translate Untranslatables into other languages. The author even shares an example of a correct possibility of translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon*. In response, Terian[31] argues that the example stands for a contradiction of her own definition of the Untranslatable. However, this would be a sign of Apter's mere methodological naivety. Moreover, in his argument against Apter's Untranslatability, Terian claims that terms such as *midrash*, *monogatari*, *xiaoshuo* and *qissa* (kept in the original in Moretti's text), seem to be examples for the cases of "real" Untranslatables, possibly for "translations that are obviously incommensurate"[32] which, despite their apparent untranslatability, have been translated into other languages, more specifically as "Hebrew, Japanese, Mandarin and Arab *novels*." This is true, but there is a nuance: the rendition has operated, through metonymy, with the help of the hypernym, the genre specificity has been surrendered to the ethnicity of the novel. Therefore, translation has taken place, but the rendition failed to transfer the concept's specific traits. In this case, the Untranslatable resisted by being the "the sovereign-as-untranslatable," defined by Gramling as "that which claims or maintains power (successfully) [and] may then be perceived primarily or derivatively as that which does not translate or does not get translated."[33] The Sovereign has its own "Dominant" system, as Mundt puts it, "that maintain[s its] status by sheer force, as exemplified in dictatorial states,"[34] as opposed to the hegemonic system that is a tolerated domination. Consequently, although incommensurability exists, there are different strategies that can help to circumvent it in translation, conceived of as a negotiation of differences. In this view, incommensurability is not just the sum of these differences, but it is more of a mark of individuality; were it not for its existence, linguistic identity would be relativized to annihilation.

3. Translating Culturemes: Ion Barbu—A Case Study

At some point in the introduction to her *Against World Literature*, Apter states that, among other things, "questions of untranslatability are rooted in . . . hermeticism."[35] A substantial entry in the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* is dedicated to Ion Barbu, the Romanian hermetic poet par excellence. Barbu's hermeticism complicates translation, yet there emerge additional, cultural challenges, consisting in his Wallachian and Balkan allegiances, as well as mythical and mathematical constructs. As the dictionary entry contains both a number of his poems quoted in full and critical metalanguage, his hermeticism and his Balkan constructs tend to spill into the metalanguage as well. The first difficulty already arises with the title of his volume *Joc secund*, which has been variously translated as *Second Game, Secondary Game, A Hidden Game* and *Second Play*.[36] If one were to adhere to a literal translation, *Second Game* would seem to be the 'safest' alternative, as Venuti implies in his analysis of Mandelbaum's translation of the Italian hermetic poet Ungaretti,[37] in which he endorses the former's "fairly strict lexicographical equivalence" while deploring his introduction of an inappropriate "strain of Victorian poeticism."[38] However, as Barbu's volume contains an eponymous poem, the translator is sorely tempted to try for an interpretation and check her translation against it. As a result, *Second Play* emerges as the more appropri-

ate choice, as the poem suggests the play of ideas and words in poetry. Nevertheless, translational freedoms taken with hermetic poetry should be kept to a minimum, in order not to restrict the plethora of potential meanings a reader might read into the work, as Venuti also suggests. While hermeticism does not directly relate to culturemes, it gives an idea of the "great caution and humility"[39] a translator should operate with.

Barbu's use of culturemes is—predictably—most conspicuous in his Balkan cycle of poems. *Nastratin Hogea la Isarlâk* (Nasreddin Hodja at Isarlâk) is an example in point. The historical context of the southern part of contemporary Romania, called Wallachia, is relevant here: Wallachia was under Ottoman domination between the early fifteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, to different extents of political and military control. Interestingly, this history of oppression does not put Barbu off tackling it in his poems; on the contrary, in a letter to Romanian poet George Topârceanu, he claims to be both irritated by "sămănătorist"[40] poetry and hostile to foreign influences (probably French and German), which is why his poetry evinces a Balkan strain, which Topârceanu had criticized as "obscure."[41]

The translation of "Nastratin Hogea" into "Nasreddin Hodja" is already debatable. While the protagonist of Romanian writer Anton Pann's *Năzdrăvăniile lui Nastratin Hogea* (1853) is indeed based on the Islamic satirist and sage, the work's popularity with Romanian readers transformed the character into a national treasure and therefore a Romanian cultureme; in Barbu's poem there is also an intertextual allusion to Pann, but that is another discussion. However, "Nasreddin Hodja" would certainly be more evocative for English-language readerships, while it would arguably represent what Venuti terms a "domestication."[42] "Isarlâk," in its turn, is beset with other difficulties: there seems to be no referent for this white citadel evoked by Barbu, which is thus transformed into a mythical, Troy-like city. As will be seen from the following, the Turkish suffix "-lik" denotes a noun and would be the equivalent in English of "-ness" or "-tion." The search for Isar has not returned any satisfactory connections to Arabic languages (if anything, the name of the river Isar, a confluent of the Danube, suggests "water" via Indo-European and Celtic elements). However, there is a suspiciously similar-sounding word in Turkish, *esir-lik*, which denotes captivity, but also has connotations of enthrallment. As the people of Isarlâk are eagerly awaiting Nastratin's kayak on the banks of a river in order to hang from his wise lips, the enthrallment thesis is plausible. Be that as it may, a domesticating translation of Isarlâk would be too far-fetched in this case. Moreover, the Ottoman musicality of Isarlâk would be preserved if left untranslated. After all, musicality is the poetic fulcrum of Barbu's hermetic poetry, but also of his slightly more epically inclined poems, of which *Nastratin Hogea* is an example.

Moving away from Barbu's poetry[43] to the criticism devoted to it, it is evident that the profusion of culturemes of Ottoman extraction persists. *Beizadea*, for example, is mentioned no less than six times in the entry, five of which in connection to Barbu's (or rather Barbilian's, since Barbu is a pen name) person. Unlike Barbilian, who lived during the first half of the twentieth century, Eugen Simion, the author of this section of the entry, writes in the early twenty-first century, in the wake of postcolonialism. As it turns out, *beizadea* is going through a contemporary revival in Romanian society at large, due to its ironic connotations. In Turkish, *beyzade* denotes the son of a prince or a

noble and a refined person, thus lacking negative connotations. In contemporary Romanian, however, the word is used most often in connection with the offspring of (allegedly corrupt) Romanian public figures who seem to be born with a silver spoon in their mouths. According to Rodica Zafiu, the ironic connotation of *beizadea* was already in place by 1913; she also claims that in the second half of the nineteenth century, the political discourse of modern Romania was ironically recycling vocabulary of Turkish origin, alluding particularly to corruption and decadence. As the word *beizadea* "fills a lexical void"[44] (the only other expression in Romanian with a similar meaning being *copil de bani gata*, which literally translates into "a child of ready money"), its translation is of course problematic, especially if one would like to observe (Derridean) quantitative equivalence: "offspring born to privilege" falls short of the desired economy of language. As the *beizadea* is most often contrasted to the Greek-mythology-loving geometrician Barbilian within the entry, the Ottoman overtones emerge as important: the decadence and corruption of the Ottoman empire is contrasted to the noble Greek ideal.[45] Under these circumstances, keeping the untranslated *beizadea* or perhaps even its Turkish form *beyzade* seems appropriate. Not so with another cultureme mentioned four times in connection with the young poet's German adventures, his dissipation and the neglect of his doctoral studies: *crailâc*, which is made up of the Slavonic *crai* and the Turkish suffix already mentioned above. The denotation of *crai* refers to ruler or prince, whereas its connotation pertains to the realm of decadence, meaning roué, rake, philanderer or libertine. Due to its suffix, *crailâc* would translate as "rakemanship" (overwrought and unfortunately invented), "the ways of a roué," "libertinage" or, if one wants to avoid the French nuance, "libertinism." This translation strategy would sacrifice foreignization over domestication, but it would be necessary to the intelligibility of the text.

4. Translating Ideology: *Poporanism*

THIS SECTION addresses the possibility of translating into English a Romanian concept, *Poporanism*, which has been placed under the umbrella of the generic cultural-esthetic ideology known as *Traditionalism* (mainly in opposition to *Modernism*). The main problem that arises in the translation of this term into English (or into any other language, for that matter) consists of the fact that it is, at the same time, an ideologized and ideologizing concept bound to its cultural space because of its nuances, but also part of a broader multilayered network. Thus, the concept refers to things local and transnational: *Poporanism* is derived from the Romanian word "popor" (En. "people/peoples"[46]) and shares similarities with *narodnicism* and *populism*.

The English translation of *poporanism* as populism is a debatable choice, for it gives rise to problems not only of connotation, but also of the loss of its original meaning. From a contemporary perspective, *poporanism* is thought of as one of the "so called literary currents of autochthonous origin from the first decades of the twentieth century" illustrating "the powerful resurgence in the literary domain of extrinsic influence factors (ideology carriers)."[47] More of an ideology than a literary current, it promoted the emancipation of the rural individual through culture, whose agents were

the intellectuals that were seen as having a moral duty to help the peasantry. This social class was considered the purest of all, uncontaminated by the sterility of Westernized civilization. As its paradigmatic form of expression, the artistic work is the place that reflects "the two thousand years of the Romanian people's subjective and objective life in the natural environment in which it was meant to live."[48] At the core of this ideology is the Romanian peasant and in the view of its leading ideologue Garabet Ibrăileanu "*poporanism* is not a theory, it is an attitude, it is the feeling of gratitude, of sympathy and of responsibility for the peasantry."[49] Its advocates are, thus, militants and activists; some intellectuals even moved to the countryside to educate the peasants. In literature, its aesthetic credo maintained that the main figure of the work of art must be the peasant in her natural environment, described in a realistic way. Ibrăileanu is very explicit in this regard: *poporanism* is "the moral attitude of antipathy towards the village's leeches . . . , because it implies the attitude of sympathy towards the peasantry."[50] Therefore, it is more of an ideology than a mere literary current and it also echoes the Russian *narodnicism* (Russian *narod* = people). C. Stere was the first ideologue of *poporanism* and the first to have used the denomination; in his youth he was influenced by *narodnicism* and he even served within the movement.[51] However, C. Stere published his first article related to this ideology as late as 1894, followed by other ideologues detailing the importance of the work and exemplifying it with actions of the Russians *narodniks*.[52] When he speaks of *narodnicism* he uses the domesticated *poporanism*. This may suggest that the terms are each other's counterparts. From an etymological perspective, *narodnicism* is derived from the Russian term *narod* which, "exactly like 'people,' signifies both the population of a country and 'the lower classes, the common people.'"[53] Similarly, *poporanism* is a term derived from the obsolete Romanian term *poporan*, meaning an individual of low social status; *poporan* is also derived from the Romanian *popor*, which could be translated as *narod*, and which designates both the population of a country and the individuals of low social standing.

Since they are so similar to each other, we might compare the translation of *poporanism* into English to the English translation of *narodnicism*, its official equivalent,[54] which has been translated as *populism*. However, *populism* does not quite fit the ideology of *poporanism,* nor that of *narodnicism,* for two reasons. First, although *populism* is similar to *poporanism* from an etymological perspective (both terms are derived from the Latin *populus*), they do not reflect the same realities: the Romanian peasants were oppressed by the landlords and their uprising against the latter was violently suppressed in 1907, while the peasants in the Unites States could forge alliances. Second, in contemporary times, *populism* comes with a negative connotation attached, at least in Romania, being representative of politicians who make vain promises in order to gain votes.

One possibility would be to translate it as *peopleism*, for in this way it is distinctive from the pejorative *populism* and it is more similar to the Romanian counterpart in its morphological form, but the disadvantage here is that the English "*people*" lacks the nuance of low social standing the Romanian "*popor*" has. Another reason for the translator to opt for the odd-sounding *peopleism* is that *popor* is synonymous with the albeit archaic Romanian *norod*, which shares not only its etymology with the Russian *narod*, but also its mean-

ing: in Romanian *norod* particularly refers to the social category of the peasantry, thus emphasizing the similarities between the Romanian and Russian cultures in contrast with the American one. Consequently, considering that the translation is addressed to an academic public, the translation *peopleism* should be accompanied by a footnote elaborating on the Romanian connotation.

To conclude, this paper has attempted to illustrate Spivak's contention that "translation is the most intimate act of reading, a prayer to be haunted [by the text]"[55]. As we have seen, cultural and ideological specters haunt our languages to an extent that requires translators to proceed with care, though not with (the paralyzing) fear of untranslatability in its narrowest sense. The history of Central and Eastern Europe shows that translation has enabled the region to become what Caryl Emerson calls "intuitively 'comparative'"[56] and furthermore "cosmopolitan, restless, homeless, a natural translator and hub."[57] The selective translation of the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* will hopefully provide the rest of the world with as much context as is necessary to whet readers' appetites for Central and Eastern European literature in general and for Romanian literature in particular.

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Notes

1. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London–New York: Verso, 2013), 3.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. Nikil Saval and Dayna Tortorici, "World Lite: What Is Global Literature?," *n+1* (Fall 2013), https://nplusonemag.com/issue-17/the-intellectual-situation/world-lite/.
4. *n+1*'s stance was anticipated in Romania by Ioan Kohn's *Virtuțile compensatorii ale limbii române în traducere* (Timişoara: Facla, 1983).
5. Saval and Tortorici.
6. Gauti Kristmannsson, "Theory, World Literature, and the Problem of Untranslatability," in *Untranslatability Goes Global*, eds. Suzanne Jill Levine and Katie Lateef-Jan (New York–London: Routledge, 2018), 129.
7. Ibid., 132.
8. Ibid., 130.
9. Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen, "Introduction: World Literature in the Making," in *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets* (New York–London: Routledge, 2016), 8.
10. Klaus Mundt, "Against the "Un-" in Untranslatability: On the Obsession with Problems, Negativity and Uncertainty," in *Untranslatability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Duncan Large, Motoko Akashi, Wanda Józwikowska, and Emily Rose (New York–London: Routledge, 2019), 65.
11. Ibid., 66.
12. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture," in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass.–London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 241.
13. Mundt, 75.

14. David Gramling, "The Affront of Untranslatability: Ten Scenarios," in *Untranslatability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 90.

15. Ibid., 81.

16. Ibid.

17. Georgiana Lungu-Badea, "Culturemul—un concept itinerant: abordare interdisciplinară," in *Comparaţia în ştiinţele sociale: Mizele interdisciplinarităţii*, ed. Raluca Bercea (Bucharest: Universul Juridic, 2015), 67.

18. Adina Oana Nicolae, "Multicultural Dialogue: Translating Culturemes," in *Discourse as a Form of Multiculturalism in Literature and Communication*, ed. Iulian Boldea (Târgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015), 215; Georgiana Lungu-Badea, *Teoria culturemelor, teoria traducerii* (Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2004), 27–33.

19. Additionally to the ones mentioned above: Ana-Magdalena Petraru, "An Overview of Translation (Studies) Methodology in Romania," *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies* 8 (2016): 375–382; Mihai I. Crudu, "Das Kulturem als perilinguistische Vorstellung im Übersetzungsakt: Am Beispiel eines Romans von Aglaja Veteranyi," *Germanistische Beiträge* 29 (2011): 210–224; Georgiana Diaconiţa, "Kulturspezifik in der Übersetzung: Eine Übersetzungskritik anhand des Romans *Der blinde Masseur* von Catalin Dorian Florescu," in *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue*, ed. Iulian Boldea (Târgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015), 363–376.

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21. Lungu-Badea, *Teoria culturemelor*, 12.

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24. Pederson, "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?," 3–9.

25. Mundt, 68.

26. Ibid., 71.

27. Ibid., 67.

28. Apter, "Introduction," XVII.

29. Gramling, 87–88.

30. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 34.

31. Andrei Terian, "The Incomparable as Uninterpretable: Comparative Literature and the Question of Relevant (Re)contextualization," *World Literature Studies* 5 (22), 2 (2013): 57.

32. Ibid., 57.

33. Gramling, 88.

34. Mundt, 70.

35. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 11.

36. For "Second Game," see Loveday Kempthorne and Peter Stephen Donelan, "Barbilian-Barbu: A Case Study in Mathematico-Poetic Translation," 2016, DOI: 10.4000/signata.1238. For "A Hidden Game," see Liviu Georgescu, "Poeme româneşti în limbi străine," http://www.poezia.3x.ro/BARBUi5.htm, accessed 2 February 2019. For "Second Play," see Ion Soare, *Paradoxism and Postmodernism in Florin Smarandache's Work* (Rehoboth, NM: American Research Press, 2001): 16.

37. Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 2nd edition (London–New York: Routledge, 2004): 468–488.

38. Ibid., 478.

39. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translating into English," in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, 258.

40. *Sămănătorism* is a traditionalist cultural movement advocating nationalism and conservatism, and promoting in art the ethic and ethnic over the aesthetic; it is directed against foreign influences and imitation and it focuses on the Romanian past and, like *poporanism*, on the peasantry.

41. Eugen Simion, "Ion Barbu," in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, ed. Eugen Simion, 2nd edition, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016), 596.

42. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd edition (London–New York: Routledge, 2008): 6.

43. What would have been interesting to pursue yet is impossible here due to reasons of brevity is the analysis of a plurilingual translation (into English and German) of the poem "Second Play," particularly since Barbu lived in Germany for several years, pursuing a Ph.D. in mathematics which he would later obtain in Romania. As Haun Saussy states, "the third language, like an uninvited guest, points to the things that a two-language patterns leaves out" (qtd. in Catherine Brown, "What is Comparative Literature?," https://catherinebrown.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/What-is-_Comparative_-Literature_.pdf, accessed 28 January 2019).

44. Rodica Zafiu, "Beizadea," *România literară* (Bucharest) 44, 31 (2011), http://www.romlit.ro/index.pl/beizadea.

45. Also according to the dictionary entry, Barbu was allegedly of the opinion that ancient Greece disappeared from history because it did not acknowledge the irrational (Simion, "Ion Barbu," 597).

46. Zulfia Karimova and Andriy Vasylchenko, "Narod," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 701–703.

47. Eugen Negrici, *Iluziile literaturii române* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2008), 132.

48. G. Ibrăileanu, "Caracterul specific national în literatura română," in *Studii literare*, ed. Ion Bălu (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1976), 113.

49. Ibid., 46.

50. Ibid.

51. See Z. Ornea, *Poporanismul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972).

52. Ibid., 39.

53. Karimova and Vasylchenko, 701.

54. Pederson, "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?," 3.

55. Spivak, 257.

56. Caryl Emerson, "Answering for Central and Eastern Europe," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 203.

57. Emerson, 207.

Abstract
The Limits of (Un)translatability: Culturemes in Translation Practice

This paper attempts a critique of the concept of "untranslatability" as it has been posited by comparatists (Emily Apter in particular), by a reactivation of the concept's implications for translational practice. It therefore first engages theoretically with untranslatability and its current critical status, with an emphasis on its detractors, who mostly hail from the translational camp. This is done with a view to 'unhardening' the concept of untranslatability while also paying attention to its substantial overlap with other concepts, such as that of cultureme, a concept which has caught on in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. The second half of the paper illustrates the tension between translatability and untranslatability through two case studies regarding two culturemes, one historical, the other ideological. Ultimately, this article advocates practical translatability over its arguably elitist theoretical counterpart.

Keywords